

SEVEN LECTURES
ON THE
PROPHETICAL ADDRESSES
TO
THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

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FROM REVISED NOTES,
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LECTURES ON THE ADDRESSES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

LECTURE I.

BEFORE entering into the detail of the addresses to the Seven Churches, of which it is my purpose to speak, it would be well to say a few words as to the general character of the Book in which they are found. It is exceedingly important that we should get a right and distinct apprehension of certain great principles which run through the whole Book of Revelation, or we shall not understand what God is spoken of in it as doing. And here, remember, that it is from scripture *alone* that we gather what the purpose of God is, and what God is about in doing *what* He does, and in doing it *as* He does.

The first chapter introduces the whole Book. It is a revelation given to Jesus Christ to shew unto His *servants* things which must come to pass preparatory to the appearing of Christ. It is a wonderful thought that God should make such communications, as is also the way in which He does it; for God cannot write as man does, merely to recount what interests or affects the passions of men; but when God writes, it is in order to bring out something by which to test our souls and bring them into fellowship with Himself. Take the Gospels for instance: they are not written merely to give an historical account of Christ when down here, but to unfold to our souls God's purposes and ways of grace, in the work and person of His Son; and it is only as we thus learn what God's thoughts and ways

are, that we are able to understand what God is doing in any part of His ways.

The Book of Revelation is a book of judgment all through. God is revealed in the book, as one about to execute judgment. This applies to the church itself, as seen in chapters ii. and iii. It is seen on the earth—subject to judgment. The prophecy may speak of the things which are under judgment, and of the means by which judgment may be averted; but still it is all through judicial, if we except the description of the glorious state of the church as the heavenly Jerusalem. But, even so, it is the case even as regards the church, when active, as she appears on white horses in the nineteenth chapter. Until we get hold of this truth clearly in our minds, the intention of the Book can never be understood.

Then, again, we do not find the name of Father in this book in connection with the saints. The Father is spoken of in connection with Christ (chap. ii. 27; iii. 5, 21), but this only confirms the remark in the text. It is used also, chapter xiv. 1., where the name of the Lamb's Father is written on the foreheads of the 144,000, and even then it is His Father, though His name be on their foreheads; neither is there the relationship of the bride, the Lamb's wife, until the marriage of the Lamb is spoken of as taking place. The system and relationship in the Book of Revelation are of another character altogether. It is God dealing with what is on the earth, according to its responsibility. This simple thought prevents very many mistakes. And further, it is not only judicial in its character, but judgment connected with the earth. That is, that men are responsible upon earth for that which is committed to their trust. So that if even the church be spoken of in this book as being on the earth, its responsibility is the subject spoken of, and as such it comes under judgment. Thus you get the earth as its subject.

The next important remark is, that the whole cha-

acter of the book is prophetic. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear, the words of this prophecy." And even when the Seven Churches are addressed, the language is prophetic. It is not so in the various Epistles in the previous parts of the New Testament. They are communications addressed to the churches or saints, directing their present conduct in the relationship in which God in grace had set them with Himself and the Lord Christ. I say these addresses are prophetic, that is, they are the announcement of results and consequences which would come upon those to whom they apply, as forming a public body, in the way of judgment—not the ministration of grace and direction in a sure and subsisting relationship as to which no change is suffered. It is not a present blessing intended for the speaker, and those who would receive it at the time as having ears to hear. We see this same difference in the Old Testament prophets and in the prophetic passages scattered through the Epistles. If you look into 1 Peter i. 11, 12, you will see what I mean. "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things." This is the proper character of prophecy. It is addressed to one and intended for others. It does not say as the Holy Ghost in the Epistles—"us:" it is a revelation of things future. A prophet did not prophesy about himself. The Spirit of Christ reveals to the prophet things about others, and not about himself. The difference afterwards is, that these same things were reported to the saints by them that had preached the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. When the Holy Ghost is speaking in the saints, He reveals the things of which He speaks as belonging to themselves; and therefore it is that when the Holy Ghost speaks in the saints, He constantly says "us." We do not find this little word "us" in the same connection anywhere in the Old Testament. "He hath loved us and washed us." "To the glory of God by

us"—"who hath blessed us"—"according as he hath chosen us"—"having predestinated us"—"who hath delivered us"—"and hath raised us up together, and hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." It is not merely shewing things to come. When the Holy Ghost shews any of the things of Christ, He includes all saints, "that we may be able to comprehend with all saints;" in a word, the Holy Ghost thus speaking takes in all saints, as now associated in the blessing, and appropriates all that God has given us "in Christ Jesus." Only it is not all enjoyed yet, so that we have still to hope to the end "for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

We have here three steps. 1st, the Spirit of prophecy in times past ministering in the prophets not unto themselves; 2ndly, the Holy Ghost sent down to announce the salvation; and, 3rdly, He becomes the seal, the earnest, the anointing, by which our portion is known and enjoyed, as the Spirit of expectancy, because, while here in the body, we have not actually got that we shall have. We have the earnest, but we wait for the adoption—to wit, "the redemption of the body." Still, the Spirit of God, as dwelling in the church, in His proper church-character, gives the consciousness of the present enjoyment of what He reveals in those two emphatic words, "us" and "we."

We saw last Tuesday, in speaking on Hebrews ix., that at the end of the age Christ was taken up into heaven, and while He is up there, before He returns to this earth again, a work is going on by the Holy Ghost, a body is being gathered and associated with Him, the Head in heaven at God's right hand, as in Psalm cx.: "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." In virtue of the Head being thus exalted to the right hand of God, He sends down the Holy Ghost to gather a body to be identified with Him in glory, to have the same glory as Himself, to be members of His flesh and of His bones. Here

is the proper church-character of the Spirit—not prophecy—not the communication of what is to happen on earth to others, but the seal, earnest, and assurance of blessings which are our own, testifying how God hath blessed us—not somebody else—and abiding with us till Christ come. Then, blessed be God! there is not a particle of the precious dust of His redeemed that will be left behind; for “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,” and Christ will take the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, to the fullest enjoyment with Himself for ever.

When the Spirit of God comes to be a prophetic Spirit, it is quite a different thing. His testimony must be applied to an earthly thing. He never prophesies about heaven. If the Holy Ghost comes and says, All the glory in heaven is yours, that is not a prophecy of some event—that is a revelation. In one sense we are there. We realize our fellowship in heavenly places, while waiting down here for the accomplishment of all to take place, waiting for the redemption of the body.

But when I come down to the earth, to think of the earth, even if I have to deal with the church, however sure its everlasting privileges viewed in its true character, it is before me as a responsible body on the earth—“the things which are” responsible according to the measure of the privileges in which it is left down here.

And it is of the last importance to keep fast hold of this truth, or we shall not understand the actings of God. The Holy Ghost dwelling in the church associates me with Christ. If righteousness is the question, I am the righteousness of God in Him;—if life, He is my life;—if glory, He says, “The glory which thou gavest me I have given them.” All that He has is ours, save and except His Godhead, in which there is no need, of course, to say, that He is, as regards us alone.* All that Christ has belongs to me, “for he

* *Morally*, however, we are made partakers of the divine nature, that we may fully delight in God.

that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Prophecy could not deal with this, for it was a mystery hid from ages and generations, hid in God; but by the Holy Ghost it has now been told out,—that the church is in living union at this present time with Christ, at God's right hand in heaven—Christ the Head in heaven—the church the members on the earth. The Old Testament saints could not talk about a Man in heaven having members on the earth, it would have had no meaning for them; and Christ must have been rejected from the earth before I could talk of His being as the Head in heaven, having members on the earth. When I get down to prophecy, then I get the church let into the knowledge of what God is going to do on the earth.

When the churches are addressed in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation, the Spirit never speaks of grace flowing down from the Head to the members of the body; and even when we see the saints on high, they are presented not as one body, but as separate worshippers, having an *object* in heaven to worship, kings and priests to God. Indeed the Spirit does not speak of the church as the body of Christ in these addresses, but of certain companies in certain circumstances, and not as members of a body, nor of the living power of grace working down here to produce blessing; but of the conduct of those who have enjoyed the advantages of this grace when they had been set in this place of blessing. It does not speak of what the church is, but of what the church has done. It is not the church's condition as set in grace by the power of the Holy Ghost (for the Holy Ghost which had put them there is not spoken of as working or dwelling in them), it is the church's responsibility. You will not find all through, as I said before, the Father's love to the children, nor yet the Holy Ghost, as the soul, so to speak, of the body, linking it to the head—nor the power of grace of which the marriage of the Lamb is the grand result. But it is the church,

in a given condition on the earth, subject to judgment: there is nothing here about union with Christ; but we find this, the testimony of what Christ is to each state of thing spoken of—His present judgment of which He reveals. This makes it very simple and easy of apprehension, and also full of profit to our souls in the way of warning—while the privileges in which we are set are the spring of all blessing—which makes it so true that “the joy of the Lord is our strength.”

But what we do get in this first chapter of Revelation, first verse, is very precious and full of instruction: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” Now this, evidently, is not Christ as the Head of the body in heaven, the Holy Ghost working in the members, to edify that body. In the Epistles that relationship and position are clearly brought out. But here it is the revelation which God gave to Christ, to shew—not to the sons—but to His servants, things which must shortly come to pass. Again, this is not the Holy Ghost, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians, bringing down instruction to the children and the bride, and shewing them their relationships to the Father and the Bridegroom, but it is a revelation to servants of things that are coming to pass on the earth, “and he sent and signified it by an angel.” The ministration of angels thus comes in, shewing the prophetic character of this passage. Observe, further, that this is not the unfolding of the riches of Christ Himself, by the Holy Ghost, but a message by an angel. Verse 2, “Who bare record,”—not of fellowship in Christ, or of the fulness of Christ,—but “of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The testimony of Jesus Christ is not His fulness, but His witness borne to something else. And mark here how we have now got down to events on the earth, and these are never the fulness of Christ in heaven; we must get our minds clear on this point.

Verse 3. Then there is the promised blessing to those that read and hear this prophecy.

Verse 4. "Grace be unto you, and peace from him which is, and which was, and who is coming; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne." The grace and peace here are not from the Father and the Son, but from Jehovah. The salutation especially as regards the Holy Ghost is not the same thing as in 2 Corinthians xiii. 14, although, no doubt, the seven Spirits allude to the Holy Ghost, the number seven being the symbol of perfection in its diversified power. The title here given to the Spirit is in connection with the display of the power and intelligence with which the earth is governed. (Compare chap. v. 6.)

Verse 5. "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth,"—"and from Jesus Christ,"—Christ is the last mentioned of the three, as shewing how entirely He is brought out here in connection with the government of the earth. "The faithful witness,"—the one who infallibly shewed out what God is, and indeed all truth, when He was on the earth. "The first begotten from the dead,"—this is the power of the resurrection "from the dead" down here. "The Prince of the kings of the earth," His place in power over all dominion here below, a place He has yet to take as to actual possession of it. He is not here called "the Son of the Father," nor yet spoken of as the Head of the body, the church; nor yet as the Lamb in the midst of the throne, but as the Prince of the kings of the earth, thus shewing that it is simply His connection with the earth that is taken up here.

But then, mark, the moment Christ is mentioned, how the heart of the church goes out with the joy of its own proper and personal relationship with that Christ: "unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." This never

fails ; when Christ is spoken of, no matter what the subject is, He is still our Christ, with whom we are livingly associated, so that it is impossible to hear His name only without its drawing forth the response of the soul, and the acknowledgment of what Christ is to it. If I think of the judgment even, and of Him as the Judge, I say, 'I am associated with Him ;' in all things He is my Christ. If in this life the wife of some eminent man saw him coming, she would naturally say, There comes my husband, because her own relationship is in her thoughts, and first in them. So of the church with Christ, whatever character He is revealed in. So it is at the end of the book, when the prophetic part is closed, we find another response of the same kind ; the moment He says, "I am the bright and Morning Star," instantly the church responds according to her hope in Him, and says, *Come*. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." And so should it ever be with us, Christ Himself should be filling up every thought and affection of the heart. It is just this that gives its value to every character of testimony to Christ, to every part of His glory. That which concerns Christ concerns me, whatever the immediate subject may be. If my heart is occupied with Himself, who possesses the coming glory, unless I find Him in the glory, the glory itself would be nothing to me. I always want something that concerns Christ, and because it concerns Christ it must necessarily concern me. It is perfectly true that some subjects, even connected with our Lord, are more interesting than others, and that in proportion as they bring us into closer connection with Himself. The crown of Jesus in that day will be composed of many diadems, and each one, though worn in respect of others than the church, will form part of our joy, because part of His glory, for *we* should be unhappy if we thought He could lose any part of His crown of glory. Our joy does not only consist in the knowledge of individual salvation, as our individual salvation is not the end of

our joy. Although, blessed be God, it is the beginning to us, there is not one thing, however apparently disconnected with it, that can ever lose its value in the eyes of a saint, viewed in its connection with the glory of Christ. We may see this carried out at the death-bed of a Christian; if Christ Himself has been his joy, all that belongs to Him will be precious. If the soul has been merely occupied with the work of Christ, in bringing salvation to itself, there will be peace, because it knows salvation; but if the person of Christ has become the object of affection, and the soul is occupied with Himself, such a one has a constant spring within of joy, as well as settled peace; for when Christ is the personal object to the soul, it possesses a joy, which the mere fact of knowing we are saved, blessed as that may be, will not continuously give. If Christ fill the heart, it will not be merely that I am happy because I am saved, but the thought of Him to whom I am going will fill my soul with joy. It is true that I am going to heaven, but the thought that makes heaven a heaven to my soul is, that Christ Himself is there; there is some one to go to; the person I have loved on earth I am going to be with in heaven. And thus it is always expressed in Scripture. For the Spirit it is departing and being with Christ.

From the very beginning of the book the church is put in a separate place; her priestly place is in heaven (outside the sphere of the action of this book, or rather inside, within the veil) above, in the place from whence the book came. Such, then, as speaking on earth in the 5th verse are the church's thoughts—"unto him that loved us"—no thought or question of judgment, He "hath loved us;" no uncertainty as to condition, He hath "washed us from our sins in his own blood;" the believer's place is no longer a question when the prophetic witness of the book begins. Christ hath died and is risen again, "and hath made us kings and priests," which titles we get without our

responsibility bringing them into question. Responsibilities we have, but Jesus hath washed us, and we are conscious of the place in which we are set, having the answer of the heart in which the Holy Ghost dwells.

The place of the church is unquestionably settled before anything else is unfolded. This same principle is more elaborately brought out in chapter i. of Ephesians. The church is first of all placed in the very same acceptance that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is, before it is shewn the "mystery of his will." This is not prophecy, but the church being placed, as Christ Himself, to be the reflection of His glory. First, thus "accepted in the beloved," God then, in the aboundings of His grace, in wisdom and prudence towards her, lets her into the secret of His thoughts and purposes as to the glory of Christ, in gathering together in one all things in Him.

The Spirit closes it all with an Amen, and now begins with the earth, and speaks of the effect of Christ's coming on the inhabitants of it.

Verse 7. "Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Not so the church. I am not going to wail when I see Christ. Ah! how my face will brighten when I first get a glimpse of Him; though, alas! if our affections are not right, it cannot be a present joy to think of being caught up to meet Him. And here I would ask, is there anything allowed that would make you wish the Lord's coming delayed, any mere natural affection even that comes in, turning the eye and the heart away? If the heart is wrapped up in Christ, and we feel what it is to be in such a world, not of toil, merely, but of sin, what a thought to be with Christ out of it! Surely there is not a chord in the heart of the saint that does not vibrate exactly contrary to the feelings of those whose eyes shall see Him and wail! And yet the positive hope, the joy of seeing and being with Himself, is a yet fuller

and more abiding source of joy than deliverance itself. When I say, "*Every* eye shall see him," then it is wailing with the poor world; but when I say, "My eye shall see Him," then every feeling of my soul will bound up with joy, the very opposite of wailing. Am I looking even only to be spared? Did not Christ say, "I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you unto myself?" which was really saying, "This world is not good enough for you; I cannot stay with you here, where sin and sorrow are stamped on all around; but when the place is prepared I will come and take you to be with me where I am." What an entire difference between the two aspects of the coming of the Lord!

Verse 8. After seeing His glory and dominion we get the glory of His person, "The Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending"—the Almighty. It is not the Father here. What a difference between looking for what the Almighty one will do upon the earth, and being taken up to my Father's house, and talking of what my Father is for us there! There are three great names in which God reveals Himself to man; first, to Abraham, in Genesis xvi.: "I am the Almighty God (El Shaddai), walk before me and be thou perfect." It was like saying, I am the Almighty, therefore do you trust in me. What is called perfection is a response to the character in which God is revealed to us. "He suffered no man to do them harm, and reproveth even kings for their sakes." (Psalm cv. 14.)

Secondly, when He comes to Israel, He takes another name. In Exodus we find Him revealing Himself to them as Jehovah, the ever existing one, going on to accomplish all His promises.

Thirdly, to the saints now, it is as Father. They are taken into connection with the Almighty and eternal Jehovah, in the relationship of children to a father, in the enjoyment of eternal life imparted to them. "I will be a Father unto you . . . saith the Lord Almighty." Hence we cannot answer to this revelation

but by the spirit of adoption, and being really children and possessing the nature and Spirit of Him who is our Father. Hence it is not said, as in the case of the titles, Almighty and Jehovah, Be ye perfect with ; but when the Father's name is revealed, which Christ has done, Be ye perfect as. We do not trust Him as strangers ; we walk with and like Him, as children ; so that it is as Father that we know Him, who is Almighty ; and Christ says, it is eternal life to know the Father and Himself. Again, " he that hath seen me hath seen the Father ;" and, again, " he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service ; and this they will do because they have not known the Father nor me." They think they are serving God when they are killing God's children : but the Father and the Son they do not know. We have seen that this title of " Father" is not that in which God is revealed in the Revelation ; He is in those of Almighty and Jehovah.

Verses 9—13. " I John . . . was in the isle of Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Mark again, here, the character that Christ takes in connection with the Seven Churches, as well as with the world. It is not as the Head of the body, as the source of grace to His members below, but as one walking in the midst of something outside Himself, and pronouncing His judgment on their external state.

Verse 13. We see though Christ here is revealed as the Son of man, He is also Jehovah, and bears all the characteristics of the Ancient of days in Daniel vii. " His head and his hair white like wool." In Daniel the Son of man is brought to the Ancient of days. In Revelation* i. 14, He is shewn as Himself the Ancient of days, " His eyes were as a flame of fire," to pierce into the heart in judgment—" God is a consuming fire." " And out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged

* Indeed in Daniel, too, we see that the Son of man is Himself the Ancient of days. (See verse 22.)

sword,"—thus holding all authority with the sword of judgment.

Verses 17, 18. "And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead; he saith unto me, Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore."

It is wondrously encouraging to the soul to think that He that is divine, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, besides whom there is no God, is the very one who went down under the power of death for my sins, and then by rising again without them, has not only for ever put away every sin, but has delivered me from him who had (and justly too) the power of death, that is, the devil, and brought me up into the very presence of God. He "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." It is this which gives such settled peace to the soul; for if I have come to God, I have nothing more to seek; "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." If my soul has seen Christ dying on the cross for its sins, I have met God there also in the solemn question of judgment; and then I have come to God through a dead and living Christ; and having come to God Himself, I have got all that earth below or heaven above can give me. For this meekest, this lowliest One, who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, is the very God to whom I have been brought, and that now, without the least spot of sin which could make me ashamed in His presence, so that I am with Him in perfect love, all cause of fear being for ever removed: and He lives to reveal Himself to us in the power of an endless life.

Verse 19. To return to the prophetic part. We get here what is very important: the three great parts of the Book of Revelation very distinctly stated. First, "The things which thou hast seen"—that is, Christ walking among the candlesticks. Secondly, "the things which are," the time-condition, or external state of the churches, or professing church, on earth, not the eternal state and unchangeable privileges of the church, as the

body of Christ. Thirdly, "the things which shall be hereafter,"* the prophetic things, the closing events in dealing with the world.

Chapter iv. shews the church in heaven. In speaking of the things that are, I do not, because scripture does not, in any way allude to the eternal state of the church in its union with Christ, as its Head in grace, but to a time-condition, an external state of the church, considered as responsible here below during a given period; and this time-condition, this external state, judged in the seven churches. Again, I repeat, it is not our "spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" that are spoken of here, but that in the midst of which Christ is walking, outside Himself on the earth. On earth He needs a candlestick—a light; not so in heaven, there is no need of a candlestick there—no candle there to give light, "for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." But on earth He needs light-bearers, and therefore the character of candlesticks is given to the seven churches to be the "light of the world;" they are lighted from heaven to give light on the earth, in the dark places below; to bear testimony to Christ while He is away in heaven, hid in God. And it is to test these light-bearers that Christ walks as the Son of man amidst the candlesticks. It is true that our life is hid with Christ in God; but while walking on the earth we are to shine as lights in the world; the displayers of what heaven can produce; to be living in heaven while walking on the earth—as Jesus spoke of Himself when on the earth—"the Son of man which is in heaven."

Verse 20. "The mystery of the seven stars" gives the thought of power—subordinate power—and the angels† are the symbolical representatives of the

* Rather, "after these," that is, after the things that are.

† Note here, it has been supposed that this word is used in reference to the angel of the synagogue, and hence means the bishop or chief elder. But the angel of the synagogue was not the ruler of the synagogue at all; he was a reader, a kind of

churches. Spiritual power, as representing Christ on earth, was what the church might have displayed. Throughout scripture superior power is symbolized by the sun, and subordinate power by the stars. The angel of anything means the representative of that which was not itself in presence there, as even the angel of Jehovah. So when Peter knocked at the door it was said, "This is his angel;" and of children, "Their angels." For an illustration of what I mean, when Jacob had met the angel at Peniel, it is said he wrestled with the angel and prevailed, but he called the place, "the face of God;" so Moses was with the angel in the bush; and in this way we have the angels of the seven churches.

Let us now take up the general idea. We have seen that we have not the church looked at here, as in union with Christ its Head, nor seen in its proper heavenly character (although that should be manifested by it), but in its time-state, as under the eye of the Lord for judgment. Instead of Christ as the Head of the body, what are set forth here are the responsibilities attaching to the body in its time-state, and certain conduct expected for privileges received. Nor is it the giving of these privileges, but the use we have made of these privileges, which is treated of. Let us look at particular times of blessing to the church in illustration of this. The Reformation, for instance, was a work of God's Spirit; and God comes, as it were, looking to see what man has done with this His working—how men have used the blessing they then got through the revival of His truth, judging what use they are making of privileges then given them. What comes out of the

clerk; the ruler of the synagogue was quite another person. It may be that at the time the Apocalypse was written, the eldest, or most eminent among the elders, had a kind of precedence; but if it were even so, in fact, so as to render him responsible, the fact that he is called angel here is a proof that if the responsibility was maintained, no such ecclesiastical title would be owned in scripture by the Lord.

three hundred years elapsed since the Spirit of God worked so mightily? The work of His own Son, the gospel of His grace, justification by faith was, we know, that which then came out to light. In what has this resulted in the professing church? It is as though He had said, "What more could be done? I sowed good seed, I planted a choice vine, and now I have come for fruit, and where is it?" None of the seven churches, consequently, are any work of God in itself. What takes place is a judicial investigation, and God is not judging His own work, I need scarcely say, but man, on the ground of responsibility, according to that which he has received through that work.

I see in scripture a complete and very definite distinction in speaking of the church of God. The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, was the testimony of the prophets before the Holy Ghost was sent down. Christ said, "On this rock I *will* build my church;" it was not yet formed. We do not get Christ as the Head in heaven until redemption is an accomplished thing; I am not here speaking of individual salvation, but of the body of Christ. In Stephen we get another step: a man on earth, filled with the Holy Ghost, sees heaven opened, and the Son of man at the right hand of God. In Paul, again, a yet further point—that is union with Christ. Christians are members of Himself, and this not merely by participation in His nature, partakers of the divine nature, but by the power in which He was raised, union by the Holy Ghost to Himself the Head—"Why persecutest thou *me*?" If my hand is hurt, I say I am hurt, for my hand is a part of me. But then there is another character which this body consequently has, it is "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Now the church being the place where God dwells, and set on the earth for the manifestation of God's glory, God then comes to judge what the fruit of these privileges has been when put into man's hand; it is not the fact of the Holy Ghost dwelling in the

church that is spoken of here, but the use that men have made of it.

There are two principles on which God always judges His people. First, their original state, the point from whence there has been departure, the blessing He began with; secondly, that point to which His ways are tending; the hope set before His people; the fitness for the blessing with which He is going to meet them at the close, on the manifestation of His presence.

We may take Israel, by way of example, as shewing out the principle. In Isaiah v. God says, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" And then, in chapter vi., where the glory of the Lord is seen, its manifestation proved not only that the state of Israel did not answer to the blessing conferred upon them at starting, for Isaiah says, "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips," but that their state was not suited to the glory to which the Lord had taught them to look forward. The remnant according to grace are always preserved, while the rest are judged. But to return to the condition of the church, the Lord first shews the privilege He has given, and then asks if the walk has been according to it; as He says to the Ephesian church, Have you left your first love? Yes, you have; "Remember, therefore, *from whence thou art fallen.*" "I have loved you, and given myself for you," was the just measure of the love to Him, in which they should have walked, as "the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood;" put under the guardianship of the blood, as to all holy conversation, as seen in type in the priests. The blood was put on the hand, the foot, and the ear, both of the leper to be cleansed and the priest at his consecration, so that nothing dishonouring such a guardianship was to be allowed; then comes the question, Have we acted according to the blood that has been put upon us? has nothing passed it in mind, act, or walk, but what has been according

to God? The Lord always exercises judgment in a church, though He has long patience with it. He shewed His long-suffering toward Israel for more than seven hundred years after He had pronounced judgment by the mouth of Isaiah, and God never lowers the standard of the claims of His first blessing, though He may be patient when His people fail.

To Sardis He says, "I have not found thy works *perfect before God*;" yet how low was it fallen! We may bow ourselves before the Lord under failure, but though we always find that grace which lifts us up again, still, God never lowers the standard of what ought to be produced, nor could we even desire that God should. No true saint could desire that He should lower the standard of His holiness in order to let us into heaven.

I could not *accept* (through grace) anything short of the picture of the church as God first gave it. Take even man as man; well, I have lost innocence; but can I *accept* any standard lower than the total absence of sin? Nor is this all; for God now raises up a more excellent object of desire before my heart, by which He replaces what is lost, by the full revelation of Himself, His own glory in His people. Hence the saint has to judge his state, not by that from which Adam fell, nor even by the first state of the church only, but by the Christ he has to meet.

There are thus two ways in which God is judging; the departure from the first condition of blessing, and then how far the fulness of the blessing to which God is calling us is met. So that it is by our past blessing and our future blessing that God judges us. As we see in all the addresses to the churches their departure from original blessings, and the inquiry how far their present condition corresponds with the blessing to which they are called, and which is spoken of in promise. Paul could say, "This one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, I press toward the mark:" when a man can say this, then his conscience is good.

and happy with God, in view of the glory before him. But this I would desire to press on all your souls ; that your standard is wrong, and your affections are wrong, if you are doing anything but following the Christ of glory presented to the eye of your heart. You know well the church has not kept its first love ; O remember that, though He is patient, He cannot lower the standard, and therefore "repent." There is abundant grace to lift up and to restore ; but my conscience could not be happy if God lowered the picture He has given me of the church.

Man has lost innocency ; but blessing has come in by the cross, and though I have not attained the glorious result of that redemption manifested in the glory of Him that accomplished it, "I press toward the mark ;" my conscience could not be happy otherwise. Suppose the thought of the Lord's coming to receive us to glory were very present to us, how many things would disappear ; how many objects that we now cling to, how many sorrows and cares that burden us, would be nothing, were the hope of His coming steadily before our eyes ! "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

But the church has lost her first love, and has also lost her expectation. The hope of the Lord's coming makes Him very present to our souls, so as to judge the condition in which we are. You are called to meet Jesus : are you in such a position as would make you ashamed before Him at His coming ?

There is also, I may add, another principle which is a motive to holiness in the church, the presence of the Holy Ghost. It is said, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God"—do not do anything inconsistent with His presence any more than with the glory to which you are going, of which He is the witness. In the first three churches there is no reference to the Lord's coming ; but after that time, when failure had completely set in, then the Lord's coming is the thought presented ; it is our joy and our hope to sustain us when all else fails.

I would just recapitulate what I have said. The character of the Book of Revelation is prophetic. We do not at all see the church here, as indwelt by the Holy Ghost, giving the knowledge of Christ as the head of the body, or fellowship with the Father and the Son. All is judicial. Christ is distinctly the Judge; first of the church, and then of the world—of the church looked at in its earthly condition, of course, not in its heavenly. The whole book is divided into three parts—the things seen, the things that are, and the things that shall be after them; and, as we have seen, God has two great ways of judging. He sees if we are profiting by the blessings already given, and if we are walking in a way suited to the promised glory.

There is a return in grace expected according to privileges bestowed, and an answer of the heart to the glory He is calling us to; having blessed us, He expects the response, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." He looks for fruit from His grace toward us, and I am to see unto what I am called by it. Not that I have attained, but I press forward in the power of a new life, "forgetting the things that are behind." God has set His heart upon blessing us in a certain manner; and what He looks for is, that our hearts should respond to this knowledge of the heavenly calling.

May we taste now what God has called us to in fellowship with His Son; may it get such hold on our affections, that we may be able honestly to say, "This one thing I do." The Lord open and fill our eyes with the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and cause us to walk in the power of that hope, of seeing Him as He is, and being with Him and like Him for ever.

LECTURE II.

I WAS referring the last time we were speaking, briefly, to the distinctive character of the church of God; and to the character of this book, as being one of judgment, whether as regards the church or the world.

It is important to distinguish between the view of the church of God as a responsible body on the earth, and therefore subject to judgment, and that view of it which looks at it as the body of Christ; and as enjoying her proper place before God, and her privileges as such. We must keep these two truths distinctly and definitely before our minds, or we shall get into confusion.

We saw the last time that God has given Christ to be "Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." God's thought and purpose about the church is, that it should be the body of Christ when He takes dominion over all things. God has exalted Christ far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and hath put all things under His feet, and given Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, and therefore called "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." All the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ; but this is quite another thing; we are His fulness, that is, we complete the mystic man, Christ being the Head. For the church is that which completes and displays Christ's glory in the world to come; and then there will be not only a Christ in heaven known to the believer, but Christ ruler over the earth over all things. It is a blessed thought, that it is not merely God as God who fills all things, but that Christ in redemption and mediatorial fulness in grace and righteousness fills all things. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." Everything, from the dust of the earth up to the throne of God, has been the scene of the accom-

plishment of, and witness to, Christ's glory. But when He does actually thus "fill all things," and it is not merely known to faith, it will not be alone, but as the Head of the body which is now being formed, taking the church to share in His dominion and glory. All things will be subject to Him in that day, but the church will be associated with Him. Just as it was in the garden; Adam, the image of Him that was to come, was lord over all the creation; Eve was neither a part of the creation over which Adam reigned, nor yet had she any title of her own over it, but she was associated with him in the dominion. The passage in Ephesians v. takes up this formation of Eve, and applies it to the church—"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Christ has every title to this dominion over all things. (See Col. i.) As God, all things were created by Him and for Him. And remark, that in the passage He has a double primacy—Head of creation when, as Son, He takes His place in it, for He is Creator; and also Head of the church, for "he is the Head of the body the church, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence."

A second title to headship is, that He is "the Son;" not merely as Creator, as we have seen in Colossians i., "hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son," but by inheritance also. In Hebrews i. we find this counsel and intention of God as regards his Son, "whom he hath appointed heir of all things," &c. Here Messiah is in contemplation.

A third title to headship is, that He is man. Psalm viii., which celebrates millennial glory, is quoted and applied by the Holy Ghost to Christ, in Hebrews ii. 6-9, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour, and all things put under his feet." (See also Eph. i. 22; 1 Cor. xv. 27.) Thus we see His title to dominion; first, as Creator, "for by him were all things created;"

secondly, as the Son, "whom he hath appointed heir of all things;" thirdly, as man, under whose feet, in the counsels of God, all things are put. Then, we may add, He cannot take the inheritance as a defiled thing, and therefore He hath a fourth claim in the way of redemption; His title is to a redeemed and purified inheritance—"the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." With us, who were under sin, alienated in mind by wicked works, it is not merely purifying, guilt also is removed. Then He takes and makes us His body; as it is written, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." The Holy Ghost comes down and consecrates us to be the body of Christ in living power; and in unity, because baptized with the Holy Ghost into one body. Not only is each soul quickened and sealed by the Spirit, but believers are "baptized into one body by the Spirit." This began at the day of Pentecost, and since then this baptism has been the portion of every believer. It is a great and blessed truth, that however we may have grieved the Spirit, still, individually, the Holy Ghost abides with the believer and reproves him; and it is also most blessed as regards the church, that the Holy Ghost is not, like the Lord Jesus, only here a little time with His people, and then going away. "He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." And mark this, that the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in the church is in virtue of the redemption which Christ has wrought, and not dependent on our use of the privileges given; though, when present, His action is according to the use or abuse of these privileges.

The church of God, united to the Lord Jesus Christ, has its place; first, by virtue of Christ's person; secondly, in redemption by Christ; thirdly, by the presence of the Holy Ghost. This is not a question of prophecy, but it is the power of divine, living grace, putting the church in divine glory. The moment the Holy Ghost thus formed the church, it is treated down

here as the body of Christ, "from which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." Just as in the growth of a child, the body is there, and each member is in its place, and it grows up into its full stature.

There are two distinct aspects of the church, however, presented to us in Ephesians i. and ii.—the body of Christ is in heaven, and the habitation of God by the Spirit on earth. This second character of the church is a deeply important one. The church of God, being formed by the Holy Ghost on the earth, necessarily involves the responsibility of the church to manifest upon the earth the glory of Him that set her thus. Responsibility never changes God's grace, but while the church remains upon the earth she is responsible for the glory of her absent Head down here; not as under law, of course; but the church is responsible to represent the glory of Him who has redeemed it, and put it here; it is to be a light in the midst of darkness—"in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; shewing forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." And as Paul says in 2 Corinthians iii., "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, known and read of all men." The word is "epistle," and not "epistles," of Christ. It is one body—one transcript of Christ. The church was set as Christ's epistle of commendation to all men, that in it men might read and see the power of redemption, and the character of Him who is out of sight, through the Holy Ghost dwelling in it, and forming it to be the visible witness of its invisible Head. Jesus says, in John xvii., "that they all may be one." And to what end? "That the world may believe [not yet know, that is the fruit of the glory] that thou hast sent me." This should have been the effect of this oneness in reference to the present time. When the church is in manifested glory

with Christ, and as Christ, the world must of necessity know that the Father sent the Son; and not only so, but will know that the Father has loved us as He loved Jesus, seeing us in the same glory as Jesus. It must, therefore, be previous to that time, that the world should see the church as "one, in order to believe"—should see the church in this place of responsibility as this epistle of Christ. Its responsibility is, that the life of the Head in heaven should be manifested on the earth in power. Thus we see what a responsible place being under grace is, for it is through our being under such free grace as we are that our proper responsibility comes in. When we come on this ground of a responsible body on the earth, we find the Lord, of course, taking cognizance of the actings of the church under this responsibility. Thus, in Revelation ii., iii., we have the Lord not as the head of the body, not as the One from whom grace is flowing down to the members of the body, but walking amidst the candlesticks in the character of a Judge, to see if they are acting according to the grace received. This principle of judgment runs through them all: "I will give unto every one of you according to the use he has made of the privileges and grace in which the church was at first set." This is a solemn word for us, just in proportion to our estimation of grace; it is not condemnation as by the law, but the more I understand the love, of which I have failed to testify, the more my heart will be grieved when I do not give a true answer to that grace, for it connects sin, as it were, with God's name, which I bear. The effect of Israel's wickedness did not only prove man to be a sinner, but God, having placed His name there, it connected the sin with the name of God. On this ground it was the Lord rebuked Israel, when He said, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." The testimony of His name was placed in their keeping, and it ought to have been guarded by them; God will know how fully to vindicate His holy name, in the end, on the earth.

Still more is this the case in respect of the church of the living God. The world ought to see practically perfect holiness and perfect love in the church; for we are made partakers of God's holiness, and we are the objects of His infinite and perfect love. The church ought to have but one constant position and service on the earth, that of manifesting to the world what it draws from its living Head in heaven. The church never knew Christ after the flesh; the only Christ the church knows is the Christ that the world rejected, and is now in heaven; and therefore the church should be in such entire abstraction from the world as to manifest what its Head is. And thus the church should be Christ's epistle of commendation. And note the force of the word *epistle* here. The world ought to see what Christ is in you, as the law was seen written on the tables of stone (2 Cor. iii.), a living epistle, "known and read of all men." And the character of our walk will be greatly deepened according to the extent we are realizing what His grace hath done for us, and hath called us to. Thus we see the Lord never gives up this in principle; He never departs from that into which the church is called in testimony and witness, though He bears with it in patience.

But now we will turn to another point: the use that is to be made of these addresses to the churches. There are two things on the face of the matter. First, it is an historical fact that there were churches on the earth in the condition here spoken of; then, secondly, that the moral instruction is available to every individual saint; applicable to every person who has an ear to hear, and an understanding heart to know the Lord's mind. This is very simple. But if we go on further we shall find that there is significance in the number of the churches that are addressed. The number seven, being the symbol of perfection, is the number often used in this book—seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials—thus the choice of this number marks the complete circle of God's thoughts about the church, as re-

sponsible on the earth, according to the grace in which it has been set there. It is not that there were only seven churches or assemblies on the earth at the time these addresses were given; as we know, for instance, of Colosse and Thessalonica, and so many others; but these and all the others were left out, because they did not furnish the moral elements which were needed by the Holy Ghost for this complete picture.

When thinking of the unity of the body with the Head, we get into privilege, and not responsibility—the life of Christ and the glory of Christ as the measure and the end. But these chapters present the actual and diversified state of the church. The next point is, that these seven churches are taken up distinctively, in connection with responsibility; and then, further, they cannot all apply to the whole body at large at one time, because we find such different states among them, and therefore we cannot apply what is said in one of them indistinctively to another, as there are distinctive charges and distinctive promises. We shall find, however, on entering into details, that different parts of the professing church with distinctive characters are spoken of as partially subsisting at the same time. So that we get this. Each description does apply, in one sense, to the church at large, yet all do not to the whole church at one and the same time; and therefore you get in these churches either a successional picture of the condition of the church upon earth, as responsible to God, from the beginning to the end of this dispensation, in a prophetic way, or a particular state of a part necessary to complete the whole picture, the different aspects that it has presented in the world, until the Lord speaks it out of His mouth. Then you will say, "How can the church be spoken out of Christ's mouth, when the church is the body of Christ, and must be with Him in the glory?" That is true, if you speak of the body of Christ, but the church as an external body on earth never loses its responsibility, whatever its characteristics may be. Looked at as on

earth, it is responsible for its conduct. If the unworthy servant did not do his master's will, he was to be treated, not as being not a servant at all, but as a hypocrite, according to the position in which he was found, though not as being really such, for servant he was none really. It was not said to him, "You are no servant;" but "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness . . . and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." Thus he was taken up and condemned on the ground of his profession. So it was with Israel. They were formed by God to bear His name before the world—they failed—they were dealt with as responsible, and were set aside, as looked at under the old covenant. The word to the barren fig-tree was, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." The fig-tree might bear leaves, but when the Lord came seeking fruit, finding none, he said, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward and for ever . . . and presently it withered away." Thus Israel, as a vessel to bear God's name unto the world, was set aside, but this did not touch the question of God's faithfulness. He will restore Israel in the last days, and till then grace still flows on, taking up the remnant from among them as the true seed of Abraham, only into better privileges; for if Israel as a whole be set aside, then God sets up the new thing, and out of the Jew and Gentile "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The question here is not as to the certainty of individual salvation, but about the vessel God is using to bear His name before the world. Individuals who believe will go to heaven, but the vessel of testimony, having failed, must be broken. God has long patience with it, but if, after all that has been done, it only brings forth wild grapes, it must be cut off. Doubtless there is a faithful remnant taken to heaven, but the vessel is cast off, as a visible public testimony on the earth.

In Romans xi. we see how God puts what He has formed at present on the earth to bear His name, in the

position of a public visible system on the earth, as He did Israel. "Behold the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if thou continue in his goodness*, otherwise thou shalt be cut off." God can cast off the professing church in perfect consistency with what He has revealed Himself to be, because it is not a question of His grace and goodness, or of individual salvation, but simply and only of responsibility; and this it is which makes His dealings with these churches a deep and positive warning to us, as the very same principle applies to Gentile as to Jewish testimony. God will accomplish to the very word every promise He has made to Israel. Yet we all know as a plain fact that God hath cast off Israel as visible witnesses to bear His name to the world. And He will in the same way cast off the church, if it fails in its responsibility on the earth. Thus we see how God maintains His government in respect to the testimony which His people ought to bear under every dispensation, and that while individual salvation is for ever secured to individuals in Israel and the church, both will be set aside as to their public visible testimony. Thus we get not only responsibility, but the results of failure. We will now take up the positive example and warning that God gives us in the word to Ephesus. It is, of course, a great means of strengthening the soul, its being instructed in the ways and actings of God in the scriptures; but it is a source of joy to myself to get the immediate application of truth to my own soul. General principles of scripture are very blessed, but the individual application of truth to the heart and conscience is still more happy.

In these addresses to the churches we have first the character of Christ, which is always adapted to the state of the particular church. Thus, in the first, to the Ephesians, as a matter of general application, we have "He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candle-

sticks;" that is, Christ revealed in the particular character in which He exercises judgment. Secondly, in each church we see the special character of the trials of the faithful. And, thirdly, a special promise is given to sustain the faith of those under the trial. Thus it is all suited grace and mercy to meet the special circumstances. And then, fourthly, looking forward to the time of fullest blessing, we see the portion given, "to him that overcometh," when Christ has taken the saints to Himself.

The churches are divided into two portions; three churches in the first division, and four in the second. This is a point of great interest. The church generally seems to be addressed as such in the first three churches; that is, saints, though having to overcome, are looked at as in the body at large; the little remnant more distinctively apart in the latter four. Thus, through this division also we get distinctive characteristic parts of the professing church. In the addresses to the first three churches, the exhortation, "He that hath an ear let him hear" precedes the promises to the faithful overcomers. In the latter four it follows the promises. In the first three the hearing ear is spoken of in connection with the general testimony to the church, before singling out the faithful remnant who overcome. In the four last the exhortation follows the overcoming. In the first three, also, the coming of the Lord is not spoken of but for the same reason as for the greater distinction of the remnant. With the fourth, attention is directed to the coming of Christ. This was now the remnant's hope, not the return to primitive order. The public professing body was utterly corrupt.

In the former three the thoughts of the church are, as it were, called back to its original condition and standing, a condition which was held out as one to which it was possible it might be restored, if repentant. We were remarking in the last lecture that God has two standards of judgment in dealing with a people placed in responsibility; either the grace which has

placed them there, and therefore the thought of restoration because of this grace, and according to the standard it has given, or the glory to which they are called. In the first three churches we find the former of these. But in Thyatira another thing comes in. The church, as a whole, has proved to be in a hopeless condition (I speak of the church in testimony here as a visible body in the world), and then the individual hope is always given, and the address of the Spirit is especially to those that overcome, and, as may be seen, the coming glory at Christ's return held out as the encouragement; and, therefore, in Thyatira we get this distinctive hope held out to the remnant, "that which ye have, hold fast till I come."

With these general truths I would also remark, that, in the address to the first church, Ephesus, we see the general character of Christ as exercising judgment, "holding the seven stars in his right hand;" that is, holding all the authority and all the power, "walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks," the churches, going round to see whether the lights were burning brightly, giving out that true light which He had lit up.

We see, consequently, in every one of them the peculiar stamp of responsibility. Then observe how He commences this Ephesian address, by touching upon every point that He can in any way approve of, before He brings out the opposite side of the picture. "I know thy works, thy labour, and thy patience." What a blessing that He does know all about us, even "the thoughts and intents of the heart!" "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Now mark another important principle. What must Christ necessarily be jealous about, but His love to the church, which was stronger than death? It is utterly impossible that He can forget His love to the church, and therefore just as impossible that He can be satisfied without the return of her love to Him; for remember that it is only love that can satisfy love.

The very reproach He makes brings out the strength of His love to the church, which cannot rest till it gets the same from her ; for *He* cannot cool down to be satisfied with a feeble return of His love, however much the church may have cooled down in her thoughts about Christ's love to her. There may be still much outward fruit in "works, and labour, and patience ;" but let the toil and labour be what it may, the spring of it all is gone ; you have left your first love ; there is the grand mischief. It is no matter how much you toil and labour, if love to Christ be not the motive of all your service, it will only be, as the apostle says, "like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," which dies with the sound thereof.

Here, then, in Ephesus we get the first great principle of failure, and therefore the grand general judgment which came upon the whole church. "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works" (see how He brings them back to the point of their departure), "or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." I cannot allow that to remain in the world which fails to shew forth the great love wherewith I have loved the church ; for if He did He would not be "the faithful and true witness." This principle of tender, faithful reproach is the blessed proof that His love never grows cold, however much ours may fail. In this respect the Lord's way of dealing with individual souls is exactly the same as with the church. He takes notice of all departure from Him, but the door is always open for "repentance," and when the sin is judged, and seen in the light in which God sees it, then there is nothing to hinder immediate restoration. The moment the conscience bows under the sin, and confesses it, then it gets into an upright position, as uprightness of soul, where evil has been, is shewn in the consciousness of evil, and power to confess it, and therefore the church of God, or an individual soul, must get into this state of uprightness

before God, in order for Him to restore it." (Job xxxiii. 23-26.) Get sin judged in the conscience, and then there is the revelation of the unfailing love of God to meet the need. It is thus in the daily details of christian life. Judgments may pass upon His people, but His chastening love is seen in it all. And thus is learned the reason why the Lord reproaches the church for leaving her first love. There is in it the revelation of His perfect and unchanged love shining through the condemnation of their state. And do we not see this dawn in the natural relationships of life? Take husband and wife. A wife may take care of the house, and fulfil all her duties so as to leave nothing undone for which her husband could find fault; but if her love for him has diminished, will all her service satisfy him, if his love to her be the same as at the first? No. Well, then, if it will not do for him, it will not do for Christ; He must have the reflection of His love. He says, I am not blind to your good qualities, but I want yourself. Love, which was once the spring of every action, is gone; and therefore the service is valueless. If love is wanting, the rest is as nothing. It is true that our love cannot answer worthily, but still it may answer truly; for at least Christ looks for undividedness of object, though there be not adequateness of affection. There must be a dividedness of heart, if there is instability of affection. This was the secret of all the failure at Ephesus. Undividedness of heart, as regarded the object of affection, had been lost, singleness of eye was gone, and the perfect reflection of that love which had laid hold of the church for Himself was gone. Still, while Christ says, "I have somewhat against thee," He marks everything that is good. "Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." Well, then, it might be said, What can the Lord want more? He says, I want herself. Remember this as regards the church. Then He says, "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the

first works." To me this is a very solemn but touching word to us, for we have gone much further from our first love than they; still, the heart of him that is faithful finds a certain refuge in Christ, for his soul finds in the very reproach an infallible proof of His unchanged love.

What does He take notice of as excellent here? "Works, and labour, and patience." Nothing positive is named that marks the decline, but the works that were done were not linked with the first love. And here let us observe, that the church has a positive service very distinct from what the Jews ever had. God was not looking for the Jews to go out in love, but the church, having received grace, is to go forth in grace to call poor sinners in. The Jew had the law as a wall to keep righteousness in, but no open door for love to flow out.

Take the Thessalonians, who, in this, are in direct contrast to these Ephesian saints, and who were in the freshness of their "first love," and what is noticed in them? "Their work of *faith*, and labour of *love*, and patience of *hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ"—just the very same things that are commended in Ephesus. What was the difference, then? Not that they had no works, but that the true spring of them was gone; while in the Thessalonians the spring of it all was in full play. The three great principles of Christianity, Faith, Hope, and Charity, were all at Thessalonica; that is, the full link of the heart with the source of power and grace, and not merely the work itself. There was living power in them from their fellowship with the source of power. The faith which characterized their "work" kept them walking in communion with God. The love which characterized their "labour" linked them with the source of power. And in the "hope" which characterized their patience we get the coming of the Lord as the object before their souls, for their patient waiting in service. Thus, in the Thessalonians you get spiritual power, Christ Himself as the

object, and love characterizing it all. Suppose I go labouring, and the spirit of love is in my work, what a difference there will be when the whole service is stamped with the character of this love. If it is only in preaching the gospel, how fully shall I set forth God's love to a lost world, if the love of Christ is freshly springing up in my own soul. But, alas! how often have we to reproach ourselves with going on in a round of christian duty, faithful in general intention, but not flowing from the fresh realization of the love of Christ to our souls.

But righteousness and true holiness, and the aspect of the church, in connection with these characters of God, have their place as well as the love which is His nature. "Thou canst not bear them that are evil." The natural, the normal, state of the church is the full power of good in the midst of evil, giving a bright testimony through divine power. The church ought not to be the place where good and evil are in conflict within, but in such a state as to be the manifestation of good in the midst of evil. But suppose a decline, then there is a question of evil within. "Out of your belly shall flow rivers of living water" is the only right state of the church. This is its primary and only absolutely owned state. Next comes power to remove the evil, and make it occasion of blessing when it does arise. See Acts. But if it ceases to be thus, then a question of evil within it arises, as here—"Thou canst not bear them that are evil." Now evil had come in, or this would not have been said. There was no longer this overflowing stream of goodness, but the stream having got low, it was a painful process to navigate it in safety and blessing. The banks were broken down, and evil had come in, or there could not have been this question as to evil. Take the case of Ananias and Sapphira. They wanted to get the character of devotedness, for such the church had, but without the cost of it. Thus hypocrisy had come into the church, but the power of good was there to expose the evil, which sought the

character of good for credit's sake. Love of money really governed them, modified by the love of church-reputation. And the Holy Ghost's presence must be manifested in judgment. This was a sad beginning, when the good had to be characterized by the conflict with evil, instead of the good being manifested by keeping evil out. Then, as to doctrine, it is the same thing. "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." Patience had to be exercised. We see at once that it is not the first state, joy over that which is good, but a work of patience which was needed; and we have specially to look at this characteristic in our walk as Christians. That which characterizes power individually is patience, when the time of conflict with evil begins.

But then we get another principle. There are cases in which Christ approves hatred. "Thou hatest" that "which I also hate." The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes brought in a license to evil with the character of grace, thus putting into association Christ and evil. And this is a terrible thing; the bringing in that which associates God with evil; for Satan would imitate or counterfeit grace, and thus associate God with evil, the very thing that God says—"my soul hateth." We have seen that the character in which Christ is presented is connected with judgment. He is walking amidst the candlesticks. And here, being the general and introductory church, the judgment also is the general resulting judgment. The warning, therefore, is, that the church will be removed. In sum, we get the three points, responsibility, failure, and consequent judgment. Then, with respect to the promise, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," the paradise which He has made for Himself. It is not the paradise in which God visited man to see what he was doing, as He came to Adam, and, if doing well, He was to allow him to remain, but if evil, to turn him out; but it is God taking man into His own paradise. What a dif-

ference between the paradise of man, into which God came and found sin there, and so cast man out, and the paradise of God, into which man is taken as the result of redemption, to go no more out. There are no two trees here ; there is no tree of the knowledge of good and evil here ; we have had plenty of it in our own responsibility. We shall possess it there according to the holiness of God. Indeed, in nature we do so already, being renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him that created us in righteousness and true holiness. But there is but one tree, and that the tree of life, the one unfailing perfect source of life in God, and our partaking of it the result, not of responsibility, but of redemption and life-giving power, and a redemption according to God's own counsels and thoughts. Responsibility not being dispensed with, but fulfilled according to Christ's own love. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life." Grace had sustained the individual that overcame ; and when the church had failed, instead of sailing on with the stream of failure, the heart of the individual saint having spiritual energy to form an estimate of the failure within, and judge it in the sight of God, instead of being discouraged and sinking, when others were letting go their first love, they themselves overcame. But then it is well to see that grace did it all. "My grace is sufficient for thee." And the result was that they had their place in God's paradise, feeding on all the ripe fruit the tree of life could produce.

In applying all this as a general principle, we find the secret testimony of grace to the hearts of the faithful to be the source of strength. If "to me to live is Christ," it is the testimony of unfailing grace that carries me through all trials and difficulties ; nay, the greater the trial and failure, the more it brings out what God is to my soul, so that I know God in a way that I never knew Him before ; like Abraham, who, "when he was tried, offered up Isaac ;" and then he learned God as a "God of resurrection," which he had never

thus known before. What a comfort it is to find Christ so much the more enjoyed, the more we are in the midst of hindrances, and, seeing the failure, look to Him who never fails. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant."

In Ephesus, then, we find that we begin with the church's failure. Such is the witness of the Judge, and the effect of failure will be the removal of her candlestick, unless she repent; and, as to this, she is called back to the first works, or else she will cease to be a witness on the earth.

The failure was not in public acting, not in righteousness, refuting false teachers, but in intimacy of communion with Christ in her love, her works had not diminished in quantity or zeal; their character was deteriorated; Christ knew when there was not the same love to Him in them.

LECTURE III.

WE saw in our last lecture that the character of judgment runs through the whole of the Book of Revelation; first of all among the churches, and then in the world. So that we have the Lord walking in the midst of the candlesticks exercising judgment, taking notice of all that is going on, and saying, "I will give unto every one of you according to your works." And we also saw the importance of remembering the distinction between the church as seen in Christ in heaven, and seen on the earth, as representing Christ. We are partakers of His life, and united to Him in heaven; but it is equally true that He has set the church as a vessel to bear His name before the world, "the epistle of Christ known and read of all men." We also remarked that the responsibility of the church down here does not touch the question of salvation in any wise; and also that God's faithfulness to individuals does not touch

the judgment of the corporate body bearing His name. God had promised in His faithfulness to carry them on to the fulness of His glory; but, at the same time, He must judge them for failure in the responsibility in which He has placed them down here. We must not confound His judgments of the vessel set in testimony on the earth, and His faithfulness to the church—the bride, united by the Holy Ghost to Christ in heaven. But, moreover, God judges His saints individually for their good by exercising their hearts and consciences in warnings, and chastenings, if they heed not warnings; and, bowing under His judgments, they are blessed; while “the simple pass on and are punished” (Prov. xxii. 3); and at length, as a body, are spued out of His mouth, while all the trials, discipline, and chastenings, turn to the profit of the church, as to its heavenly calling. In the address to each church there is a peculiar revelation of Christ made, with which the peculiar judgment corresponds; and also special promises, suited to their special need, meeting the exercise of the heart in order to sustain it, and pledges given to the faithful.

We have seen that the very first thing that characterized the church, looked at in its responsibility, as pictured by Ephesus, was, that it had departed from the power of its original standing, “left its first love;” nor is the subject now the supply of grace from the Head; it is no longer “that which every joint supplieth,” but the giving of reproofs, warnings, and promises, to act on the hearts and consciences of individual saints in their responsibility down here.

Another thing which it is well to remember here is, that we shall never find the object of the address to be the power of the Holy Ghost actively at work to form and gather; if it is judgment which is spoken of, it clearly cannot be, for Christ can never be said to judge the work of the Holy Ghost. It is power working in grace, if the Holy Ghost works. Christ, in exercising His judgment, is shewing forth His estimate of the

practical use which has been made of the work of the Spirit after it has been given. The first great truth is that the Lord looks at the church as responsible for all the love of which it is the object, and expects a return, and if He finds it not, but finds departure from the first love, which is only the sad commencement of greater failure, then He says, "Repent, or I will remove thy candlestick out of its place."

Then, again, mark another thing; it is not individuals who are judged here, but churches; although individuals may hear and profit by the warnings; but the Spirit speaks to the churches; but there being no response from the church, no repenting, no doing the first works, no returning to the first love, the candlestick is to be removed. And then the address comes individually to him "that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

But although as a church it has failed, and the candlestick must be removed, still there is such a thing as individual energy to overcome; and mark here, that it is overcoming in the condition in which the church found itself; the responsibility of individuals was that of overcoming where they were. This was very different from the state of things when the fulness of blessing was poured in by the Holy Ghost. There was now that *within* the church which was to be overcome; not in the world merely, "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." He will revive the heart of the faithful one by promises to sustain it against the snare of Satan in the world, but when decay has come in, then the conscience necessarily becomes exercised as to the maintenance of their standing where they were; snares, difficulties, and dangers had come in—for we must remember that the church had fallen from its first love, when Smyrna was addressed; and the moment the church is addressed by the Spirit, as a fallen church, it ceases to be in itself the place of security for the saint; he cannot take for granted that, in walking with it, he walks according to the power and

will of God. A fallen church cannot secure me from error; being itself under judgment, it cannot be a guarantee for anything. In truth it never was, but apostolic power and energy, which sustained and watched over it, while the apostle lived. (See Acts xx. 28, 29; 2 Pet. i. 15.)

Then individuals are singled out, for the church can no longer warrant me in this or that; the church *may* be right in this or that, but I have to make good my security against, or at any rate independent of, the church by the word of God; for I must discern what I can follow and what I cannot by the word of God, applied by the Spirit. But then this state of things by no means supposes that there was no blessing, that there was nothing excellent left in the church; for we find the Lord recognizing and commending many things. But surely I need scarcely say how amazingly important is this principle, that a failing church ceases to be a guarantee, and therefore I have to judge in individual responsibility what I am to receive and what I am to reject. The church had been, as set up of God, a place of blessing, as regards individuals, a guardian for Christ of the state they were in, as being the vessel and expression of the power of the Holy Ghost, the proper result of His working; but it is not so at all now, that it has left its first estate, and, as we have remarked, the apostles alone ever maintained it in it practically, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the church of Corinth, &c. Our responsibility, however, never changes; nor can Christ fail in needed grace for the state in which the church is.

I would here take the opportunity of making a remark on the word development, which Satan has brought in as a very favourite word. Now there is perfect and entire infidelity involved in this thought of development in the church of the living God. There is nothing in God to be developed; He is the perfect unchangeable source of all. Now what God has called us to is a perfect revelation of Himself in Christ, as we saw in

John's Epistle, chapter i. 1, 2. There was the manifestation of that eternal life which was with the Father; and it is clear that there can be no development of that which has been manifested, unless we can get something beyond the perfection of Christ, in whom all fullness dwells. God is light; Christ was the true light; and this shone out fully in the revelation of the glory of His person, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And can we get anything better or fuller than this "Light?" Can we add to this revelation of "Truth?" There is much to be learned about Him; but it is a person that is here presented, and not a doctrine. If it were a doctrine merely, we might get something added—another doctrine; but it is not a question of doctrine merely, but a living person that has been revealed. Well, then, if it is Christ Himself, what more can be revealed? We cannot add to what God has wrought. Alas! man may decline from it, as was the case at Ephesus: they had left their first love; they had left something; there is no development in that. Of course we may ever learn, and should ever be learning, more about that which was revealed at the first; but God ever brings out each thing *perfect in the beginning*—for God cannot set up anything but what is perfect—anything that is inferior, or contrary to His mind. Thus man in innocence was set up perfect in that innocence, and Adam fell. The priesthood of Aaron was perfect in its kind, but there was failure in Nadab and Abihu. Whatever God has planted, He has planted wholly a right seed, according to His mind. Whatever comes from God must be perfect, and cannot be made more perfect by any other operation whatever. This is a very simple truth, but it is one which cuts up by the roots, and overturns a whole system of thoughts and feelings which would put something between our souls and Christ. It is not that God cannot reveal in the creature more than He has yet revealed, and accomplish what is better than what went before. He does so: the second Adam is clearly infinitely more excellent than the first.

But the thing that He sets up is absolutely perfect, as the expression of His mind in that thing. Man cannot improve or add to it. The thing set up for us is the perfect manifestation of God in Christ; hence the notion of development is rejection of the true object, or blasphemy. So John says, "that which was from the beginning," when he would keep the saints secure. But even as to glory, as in man's responsibility, that passes away. God had "planted thee a noble vine, how, then, art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" From this cause, that directly a thing is put into a man's hand there is departure.

Then we get another principle. This departure having come in, God uses Satan's power, acting through the world's hostility, for two ends:—First, to exercise the divine life in a saint; secondly, to hinder a farther departure from the Lord. This is the "tribulation" they were to have; and therefore, when we come to Smyrna we hear of persecutions. If you take the history of the life of Christ, it was an exercise of trial and suffering until He reached the cross; it was not that He needed it to deliver Him from any existing evil, it only brought out His perfectness more fully, that He might be made perfect in the just result, in glory as man, of what He was morally. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered." The manifestation of all that was in Him was brought out through opposition and slighting. His path became darker and darker down to the cross. He had to overcome Satan; and says for others, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am sat down with my Father on his throne."

The second end to which God uses Satan's power, in persecutions and trials to the saints, is to hinder a further departure from Himself. There is a constant tendency in the heart of the saint to take rest in prosperous circumstances, because the flesh naturally turns to that

which is agreeable in the world for rest, the result of which is a decay of vitality within; but this will not do, therefore God says, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest, it is polluted." Persecution is the natural portion of the church of God while down here in a world of sin. And when the church began to take rest at the beginning, God was obliged very soon to bring in persecution amongst them.

In Matthew's Gospel, the Lord beautifully unfolds the spirit and character of the kingdom in the sermon on the mount—"Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are the pure in heart," &c., &c. Blessed is the character in which He introduces the witness he was bearing. God was shewing what was blessed in His sight. Then the grace of Christ was just beginning to be manifested, shewing the natural consequences of the principles and moral character of His kingdom. The miracles which He had already performed had attracted the attention of crowds from all the surrounding countries, and He thereupon explains to those who heard the true spirit and character of the kingdom, which they, indeed, thought of quite otherwise, and tells who are the blessed; but at the end of the gospel, in chapter xxiii., it is, "Woe! woe! woe!" instead of blessing. "Your house is left unto you desolate; for I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Because the opposition of man had been fully brought out by the perfect manifestation of what Christ was. The beginning of Matthew's Gospel was the blessed outflow of what was in His heart, while the course of His life brings out what was in their hearts, and hence the word, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," &c.

To return. God sends us tribulation, opposition from without, to bring out grace, and to hinder the constant tendency to decay; with Christ it was always and only to bring out grace. Thus God uses Satan as

an instrument to work out blessing even for the church. Take Job, for instance. How wondrously was Satan used of God for blessing in Job's case. It is God who begins the conversation with Satan, and He knew perfectly well all He was doing in attracting Satan's attention to Job, and says, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" Satan's malice was quite ready to plague and persecute him; but this malice of Satan was used by God to bring Job to that which was necessary for his blessing—the knowledge of the evil that was in his heart, which he could not have so learned any other way. Then, again, take Paul. He was taken up into the third heaven, there to get such a sense of the power of God as would fit him for his peculiar service to the church and the world, and such a revelation of the glory of Jesus as was proper to sustain him under all the trials he must inevitably pass through. And what is the use the flesh would make of this? Why it would puff up, and say, "Now, Paul, you have been into the third heaven, and nobody has been there but you." So there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him, and for this he besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him; but no, it cannot be removed, lest Paul should be exalted above measure; but he gets this assurance—"My grace is sufficient for thee." That which became strength to Paul, as far as himself was concerned, was that by which he learned his own weakness—"the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him;" for then it became a question of Christ's grace and strength, and not Paul's. And now Paul can say, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

It seems astonishing that God should use Satan as an instrument to try the saints with, and not interfere to deliver: but so He does, as we see here; for He says, not "*I will cast you into prison,*" but "*the devil will cast some of you into prison;*" but could not the

Lord have hindered it? Of course He could; but as the trial was needed, had He hindered the devil from so acting, He would have hindered them from the blessings which would result from such a trial. Take, again, the case of Peter. The Lord said, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee." What? That Peter should not be sifted? No, not a bit; for Peter needed sifting, because he had confidence in the flesh; but the Lord prayed that his "faith might not fail;" that is, that Peter might be sustained under his trial—his heart not lose its hold on Christ, but be assured of His love, and get the intended blessing. And to such trials of faith Peter alludes, when he says, "The trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." And when Satan had sifted the chaff from the wheat, then the Lord would use him as He said: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

When the church had fallen, had left her first love, she had to be put into the furnace, to keep the world, its allurements, and its evil, from acting on her own evil tendencies, while remaining in a body of sin and death. While she was walking in the freshness of her "first love," the world had no power over her. Christ was too vividly the object before her for her to sink into other affections, which leave the heart open to the reasoning of unbelief; but when the "first love" was departed from, then the church became the prey of her own evil flesh, acted on by the evils around, therefore she must be put into the furnace, the place where Satan persecuted, to prevent her getting into the far more dangerous place where Satan dwelleth, that is, the world.

Verse 9. "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich." Christians were poor and despicable in appearance, when the church was first set up. Leaving their first love, they were in danger

of falling in with the current of the world's reasonings, and the Lord lets loose the prince of it against them, makes them find their sorrow where they were in danger of finding a false ease and joy; and the true character of enmity of the world, instead of its false allurements, which draw them into it, and away from the Father's love; and they sink into the insignificance and poverty which the world's opposition sets the saints in. "But thou art rich," says the Lord. These poor, despised few possessed divine and exhaustless riches. They had got multiplied in the world and enlarged, and then there was a tendency to rest in the effects produced, and not on the Lord; and the Lord, loving them too much to suffer this, must put them into the furnace, to make them lean on Himself: for He will cast the church on its own proper portion altogether, and therefore He uses the hostility of the world to drive it back into its own proper hopes and privileges. But for this it would seem strange that the Lord should leave them to be tried "ten days," were it not to teach them that heaven is their portion, and not the earth: that they were not to remain on the earth, but to pass through it as pilgrims and strangers, to glorify Him who, when down here, was a stranger, and who now in glory is a stranger to the world, as the world. But then this shews also that the trial is measured. God may use Satan as a rod, but he cannot touch a hair of our head beyond what is allowed. But the church must be brought to the deep consciousness of the state from whence she has so deeply fallen. Hence, Christ not only suffered the devil to cast some of them into prison, but says also, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." They may be martyred, and what then? Jesus gives them a crown of life. The church had slipped into the world; still, where living faith was in exercise, the effect was to give Christ His true place, and to strengthen all. When once it came to the question of giving up Christ, there were martyrs, perhaps even among the worldliest. This

is often seen. Just so it is now in the day in which we live. Christians are largely seeking just what the world seek, wealth, power, and influence: these three things are just what the Lord had not. And can I be said to be a stranger where I have power and influence? Certainly not; and if the Lord turns the current against them, then they must pass through the furnace. The church must give up a heavenly Christ and a crucified Christ, if it takes the world up in any sense as its portion. The church of God cannot associate the world and religion without losing its true character. The object of Judaism was to associate religion with this world, with the earth; and thus God proved whether man could be attracted to God Himself through earthly things being associated with Him. To this end God gave them a magnificent temple, gorgeous dresses, splendid ceremonies, music and singing, that he might mingle the tastes and feelings of nature with Himself. But all this, mark, needed a priesthood between them and God; for it was not the presence of God, as light, in heaven, and peaceful communion with Himself. These earthly things do but keep the soul at a distance from God. For wherever the world is connected with religion, priesthood must come in, because the moment you get man as he is, he cannot stand before God; he cannot stand in the light, and therefore needs a priest. But we now are brought nigh; we can stand in the light as God is in the light: we are priests; and as to our standing in God's presence, there is no need of a priesthood between God and us. Christ suffered without the gate; and the moment the blood of Christ, wherewith we are sanctified, is taken into the holy place, into the presence of God, our association is with heavenly places, and no longer with an earthly city, for there is no holy city now; and we are taken outside the world altogether (and the world, as religionized in a fleshly way, for that, for us, is the camp. "Let us go out, therefore, unto him without the camp,") and inside the veil with Him. It was exactly what

the apostle was teaching the Hebrews. They could not go on with religion of a worldly character, with Judaism, which was God's earthly religion. Hence, too, it is the apostle says, if he had known Christ after the flesh, he knew Him no more. He was only a heavenly Christ to him. Carnal ordinances connected man with God under Judaism; but Christ being rejected, His followers have His place of acceptance in heaven, and rejection on the earth. The cross or heaven. Now, there is no middle thing—Christ is wholly heavenly; and we are raised up to sit in heavenly places in Him. The moment the church loses the sense of its heavenly place in Christ, the Lord in His faithful love lets loose the power of Satan upon us, just that we may learn that the very world that we are seeking to religionize is the place of Satan's throne. Of course, in such case we shall be sure to have the world and its thoughts about religion entirely opposed to us, but then we shall have Christ and His thoughts with us, who says, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer," for "I am the first and the last, which was dead and am alive." The character of Christ in the address to this church is as "dead and alive." Christ is not merely divine—God—but He is also the One who was dead and is alive again for evermore. Looked at as man, He has been rejected and cast out; so that, like Mary Magdalen, we must get either an empty tomb, for that is all the world is, if we seek Christ, or a risen Jesus. If your heart is fixed on Christ, all you will find in this world is the tomb of Jesus, and nothing in it. Then we have nothing to do with this world, for if we are in spirit with our Head in heaven, we have all our blessings there. But then it is a constant difficulty, in a world like this, to get and to keep the heart and soul up to this; but it must be done, for otherwise, if we do not cleave to the world, the world of itself will cleave to us; and if decay comes in, and the first love is left, then "tribulation" must come, that we "be not conformed to the

world." This was the case with the church here: they had left their first love, therefore had to be put through this course of trial, to keep them in remembrance that they were not of the world. Judaism crept in—development, &c., &c.—“intruding into those things which they have not seen, vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind,” instead of being a despised few, a little flock. Their numbers, increased amazingly, so that they made a fair show in the flesh. In fact, you find the whole thing rapidly conformed to the likeness of the Jewish hierarchy. Then persecution comes in and blows upon it all; and if there was persecution even unto death, where there was living faith in a living Lord, though such a one may die here, he shall not be hurt of the second death. The history of these times proves that the living power and truth in the church was not in its doctors, but in its martyrs.

Pergamos. “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat [throne] is.” Here we get another and more subtle character of evil. The Lord gives credit for all He can. The church had gone through persecution, and had been faithful. “Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith,” when Antipas, my faithful martyr, was slain. But now it was not merely worldly persecution without, that assailed but purified the church, but doctrinal corruption within. The church of God has its place of responsibility in the world where Satan’s throne is. If that ceases to be a persecuting world, because the church has ceased to be a heavenly witnessing church, still the church is living there; that is the place where, as to its external forms, it still is, and has been ever since the epoch here referred to. It is not a question here of individual conduct, but of the corporate position of the church.

People have a notion that Satan ceased to be the prince of this world when Christ was crucified; now, I would just say that it was at the cross of Christ that

Satan emphatically became the prince of this world. He was it always, really, as to man's heart; but till Christ was rejected, it might have been hoped that some means might find or cause to spring up some good in man, but the cross proved and determined the subjection of man's heart to Satan, so as that nought could deliver it as such. Of course, the cross was virtually the destruction of his power, for there Christ destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Then, in a sense, as to the accomplishment of the work which was to effect this, as to righteousness before God, his power ceased, his head was bruised, though the fruit of this accomplished work is not yet brought in by power. Man had been tried in every way, and lastly, in the Jewish system, had been put under responsibility by law, and tested on the ground of obedience; there he had failed, but he is ready to think that if he could do all he liked he would set all right. He was put to the test in this by the committal of power into his hand, in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. In both ways he failed, that is, in the Jews, and in the representative of the imperial power. Christ came. Satan risked everything in getting rid of Christ, but it only ended in his own defeat; still, he is for a time left to lead the world out of which Christ has been cast, which, in its universal and varied forms, is the instrument of Satan, as we see at the Lord's crucifixion. Satan, the prince of this world, came and found nothing in Christ; but the chief priests, Pharisees, Pontius Pilate, Jews and Gentile power, were all led of him: and even His own disciples forsook Him, through their dread of Satan's power manifested in the world. In a word, the whole world were led by Satan to reject Christ, and from that moment Satan is the manifested prince of this world; for until Christ was rejected by the world, Satan could not be displayed as the world's prince. And the Lord owned him such, calling him "the prince of this world, saying, Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the

prince of this world be cast out." "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." The church of God has been taken entirely out of the world to be associated with God's Prince in heaven; therefore Christians have no business to be dwelling, as their place of abode, their home, where Satan's throne is, living in the world and as the world. But, alas! the church has practically slipped off from "holding the Head," and has taken an earthly character. If to me "to live is Christ," it is not Christ to be standing in worldly religion; for man in the flesh must have something between him and the Head. The difference between the Christian and the religion of the world is of the most absolute character. "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living (that is, alive) in the world are ye subject to ordinances?" A man in the world must have ordinances—how can he get on religiously without them? But ordinances are not Christ—they have been nailed to His cross. There is no possibility of escaping the religion of the world, ordinances, and the like, but by knowing and walking in the power of a dead and risen Christ. Man in the flesh must have a religion of ordinances between him and God, but if united to the Head in heaven, nothing can be wanting to bring him nearer, for he is one with Christ; and if he is not one with the Head, then he is separated from Christ. Put anything whatever between Christ and the soul, and all is gone: the position then becomes a totally different one. This corrupt tendency to association with the world brought in persecution, but with it the suited promise. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." It is quite true that the Lord causes trial, but never do you find that there is with Him any moral acquiescence in evil. He cannot tempt by evil doctrine. The Lord had taught them the evil of this corrupting association with the world, by turning it into a persecuting world; but He could not send Balaam's evil teaching; for it would be impossible to

talk of Christ's sending moral temptation as a rod for the correction of the saints. He may permit it in His holy wisdom. The effort of the enemy in Pergamos was not like the tribulation spoken of in Smyrna. Balaam would associate them religiously with the world, a sadder evil than Satan's openly persecuting power. In Ephesus we had the first point of departure, leaving their "first love." In Smyrna they were put into the furnace. Persecution had not attained Satan's ends—faithfulness even unto death had crowned the sufferers with a martyr's honour: but here a new danger arises. They were dwelling where Satan's throne is; the world is the place of Satan's throne; and now corruption, pleasing to the flesh, associating the church with the world, is taught. The enemy is working within. "Thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." Thus there is an amazing and most instructive difference between the persecution of Smyrna and the seduction of Pergamos. In Smyrna the Lord says, "The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "I have died for you, and now do you be faithful unto death for me." In Smyrna the Lord would not step in to hinder the consequences of the position they were in, but turned them to the maintaining the declining church in its own true character, giving the assurance of the everlasting and heavenly promise, a crown to the faithful. But in Pergamos the fact of their dwelling in the place where Satan's throne was, shews itself in another way. And the Lord could not, without judging the world itself, remove the snare by acting on the world itself. You have got Satanic subtlety acting in concert with the world, and by its spirit in the church. A false prophet leading it into association with the place of Satan's throne where it dwelt, the world that had ceased to be a persecutor. You have got Balaam there; not Jezebel yet.

A most terrible and frightful character is that of Ba-

laam. The question had been already raised on the ground of Israel's failure, whether God would bring them into the land—whether Satan, through his instruments, Balak and Balaam, could hinder Israel's entrance into Canaan. The effort was to get Jehovah to curse Israel, but they could not, for, as between him and the accuser, "God saw no perverseness in Israel," neither was there any possibility of using Satan's power against the people of God, as Balaam said, "There is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." God held Balaam's lips, and forced him to speak blessings instead of cursings, in spite of himself. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." When the devil comes as an adversary, he has no power; the secret of his power lies in coming in as a tempter and seducer. When Satan could not prevail in getting Jehovah to curse Israel, he seduced them into wickedness, leading them "to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication;" and then how could the holy God bring them in? (See Numb. xxv.) In Pergamos Satan comes within the church as a seducing Satan; while in Smyrna Satan keeps outside the church as a persecuting Satan; therefore, in Smyrna they are exhorted, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." Weakness is "in fear;" the danger is in fear. When the saint is out of the persecution, he often trembles as he looks at it, and becomes frightened; but when once he is thoroughly in it, if he has faith, he looks out of it up to God, and finds he never was so happy. Thus he is separated from the world, and made to feel what his own proper portion is. But as the church of God is dwelling on Satan's territory, if he has not this persecuting character, then he gives her as much of the world as he can, for, as Satan says, "all that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it;" and if it can be said of the world, that "thou hast made the church rich," then the world will have the heart of the church instead of her risen Head, "for

where the treasure is, there will her heart be also." Balaam was a prophet, though a false one, and could use the name of Jehovah, and declare he must speak by His word only, and we find his spirit here coming within the church to make it at ease in the world. The wicked servant, who said in his heart, "My lord delayeth his coming, and began to eat and drink with the drunken," was treated as a servant still, though a wicked one. If Satan can only make a Christian comfortable in the world, his end is gained. Then they might go and eat in the idol temples, &c.

In Nicolaitanism we have the flesh acting in the church of God, and in Balaam it is the spirit of the world brought in by the false prophet coming in, and in a seducing way, to bring the church into league with the world, to make the church quiet and comfortable in the world that killed Christ.

We get a teacher here, a kind of religious instructor, as it says, "them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel;" "So also hast thou them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate." In the former case, in Ephesus, it was "the deeds of the Nicolaitanes;" but here it is a doctrine allowing of evil deeds—antinomianism and worse—that which was not against the law only, but against Christ, internal corruption within, connected with, and helped on by, association with the world without. It is very sad (and our hearts ought to bear the burden of what passes within the church) to see how the church still declined after tribulation had brightened it up for God, after its commencing failure in Ephesus—for the root of evil was there—and returning ease made it content to dwell where Satan's throne was, and then, of course, the door was opened for evil doctrine, false teaching, connecting fleshliness with spirituality, which is antinomianism. Satan did not desire to persecute where he could corrupt; for Satan's persecutions only brighten the soul up for God, while the seducing corruptions of

Satan imperceptibly separate the soul *from* God. There was not yet the full ripeness of wickedness, as in Jezebel's time, but only the teaching the doctrine which allowed these evil deeds; but in the next church we see there are children born of this evil, the evil being their moral birth-place.

We see the Lord's eye and heart had followed them to where they dwelt, even to Satan's throne, as He said, "I know where thou dwellest;" and from thence, that is, from the spirit of association with it, He would call them with this word of warning, "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Here the word is spoken of judicially as a sword out of Christ's mouth. In such a state of things the word of God is the source to which the saint is drawn. The promises now become much more individual. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." It was hidden faithfulness which was to be sustained by the promise of this hidden manna, seen, indeed, in one sense, because the fruits would be manifest to all around. The church as a body was dwelling in the world, then, as a necessary consequence, comes the secret life of the heart of the faithful soul with God in the power of the word. It is the inward link with that which never changes in its character, sustaining secret fidelity to God. And what a difference is this to the judicial use of the word, the being fought against by the sword of Christ's mouth; the living members being associated with the Christ who suffered on earth, but is now in heaven. The manna signifies the Son of God become incarnate to give life to our souls—His entering in humiliation into all our circumstances, and is the provision for the daily walk through the wilderness; for we find the manna spoken of in connection with Jesus as the living bread sent down from heaven. "This is the true bread which cometh down from heaven." (John vi.) But what, then, is the hidden manna? The manna for Israel was spread around the

camp, and they were to gather it daily for their food ; and so, likewise, is Christ to be the daily provision of the soul while in this wilderness world ; but this is not the hidden manna. There was to be a golden pot of manna laid up before God, and when the Israelites had got into the land, they were to have the memorial of what they had enjoyed in the wilderness. This hidden manna is the remembrance of a suffering Christ down here. The memory of what Christ has been in the wilderness as a man, a humbled, suffering man, and who is God's eternal delight in heaven ; and in our eternal state, he that hath overcome, he that hath been faithful in separation with Christ from the world, will have the everlasting enjoyment of fellowship with God in His delight in a once-humbled Christ, the same kind of delight, although in a different measure. If we are walking faithfully with a rejected Christ, instead of letting Balaam into our hearts, we shall enjoy Christ thus down here in spirit ; but we cannot enjoy Christ in our souls if we are mixed up with ungodliness in the world, if we pretend to it, then it becomes Nicolaitanism. But in proportion as we get and apprehend the secret of what Christ was in the world, in our souls, shall we feed upon Him ; but this cannot be if we are walking in the spirit of the world. Even the presentation of Christ in the Gospels we cannot enjoy, unless it is as food for the soul. A man may say that truth is very beautiful, but if it only feeds the imagination it does him no good. God did not give His Son to suffer down here, and then to be played with, but to feed upon.

The "white stone" gives the general idea of a vote in favour of any one ; it is the secret mark of approbation from one to another. There are public joys in heaven common to all : thousands and thousands of voices, in communion and praise, echoing the song of praise. And there are joys we share in Christ together here, but He must have our individual affections as well as our common affections. My own peculiar joy

in Christ you can never know, neither can I ever taste yours, and this is true of the highest affections. "A new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." That name would have no meaning for anybody else but him to whom it is given. Christ reveals himself to the soul in such sort that a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy. Individual joy, personal communion, is distinct from, though it enhances, the universal joy, and that individual joy which we know down here will never be interrupted. This promise, as do all those to the churches, relates to the future time of heavenly blessing; but it is also the source of joy and strength now. The Spirit of God makes us anticipate that day; we may have now in spirit this "white stone" from Christ, this secret expression of His grace and love, which others cannot have for me, neither can I have it for them. How this makes this "white stone" worth everything else! What a secret source of strength it is, even though all the world think me wrong, if I have the white stone of Christ's approbation, acquired in following the word, but known in the heart. But, I say again, I must judge all by the word, that sword of His mouth, that disarms and purges all the workings of Balaam. Then I do not mind; let the world talk about things as it pleases, Christ has talked to me, and in the coming day of glory will own all He has said to me.

It is sorrowful enough when a Balaam is teaching in the church, but then, mark, there cannot be any trouble among the saints that does not bring out the faithfulness of Him who waits to bless the "overcomer," and thus bring the soul into communion with Christ in a way that nothing else could; for nothing gives the blessed consciousness of Christ's approbation as between the soul and Himself, like faithfulness where evil begins to corrupt. If it is false teaching within, the word, as in persecution, and with all else, is "overcome." He that hath an ear to hear what the

Spirit said to the churches, is to be overcoming that evil, whatever it be, that besets the church.

Thyatira. The hour forbids my doing more than just looking for a moment at Thyatira. You get this difference when Jezebel comes in; it is a prophetess still, but she herself becomes the mother of children; a whole class of persons are born of this corruption. Of persons who were dallying with this corruption and evil (as well as souls simply led astray) He says, "These will I punish, except they repent." But those whose moral existence is derived from this corruption, I will kill them, as He says, "I will kill her children with death." But the moment you get this condition of the church, as the begetter of corruption, then comes in the judgment of the nations, "as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers;" and the heart of the believer is led to the coming of the Lord, "I will give him the morning star." I am glad to close with this promise, it is full of blessing. Meanwhile the Lord Himself becomes to us the hidden manna. May He give to us, and all His saints, to avoid everything like Balaam's spirit and teaching. We are one with Jesus, members of His body; we are of His flesh, and of His bones, and nothing but this union with Christ will abide; as the knowledge of our union with Christ, and the realization of it in our souls, is the only safeguard against the seducing spirit of the day in which we live. The Lord give us to be faithful to this blessed truth of being one with Him who is at God's right hand; then people may try to get between me and God by their ordinances or their priesthood, but I can say, "No; I am brought too near to God for you to come between us; and also too near to God for you to bring me nearer; that is where grace has set me, and all else is but pitiable nonsense." We are called upon to judge evil in the church, for God cannot accept Balaam and Jezebel, if we can. Therefore, may the Lord give us to remember that failure within the church is to be judged. We are called specially

to take heed to this in the day in which we live, that the church, being itself under judgment, cannot be a guarantee for faith or anything else whatever.

LECTURE IV.

I ALLUDED in a few words, the last evening, to the church of Thyatira, on account of the connection of Balaam and Jezebel; Balaam, being a prophet, acting among the saints to seduce them; and Jezebel, a prophetess, established within, being a further advance in evil; not merely a seducer as Balaam, but a mother of children there, as Jezebel, having children of this corruption.

And now we get, in this part of the chapter, into what we may call new ground. Two things mark this. The Spirit of God, who rises far above all our failure, directs the eye of the faithful remnant to the coming of the Lord Jesus: and the expression, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches," is no longer in connection with the address to the church in general, but after the promises to them that It "overcome." And this marks out the remnant as separate from the body in general. The position of the remnant is specially marked out as being no longer in connection with the general body of the church, but with the place in which those stand to whom the promise is sent, as "to him that overcometh." In the address to this church, and to the three following churches, the exhortation to hear is placed after the special promise.

The distinguishing element which we found brought into the last church (Pergamos) is, that the world is the place of Satan's throne; therefore the church must be in either of these two positions—a persecuted, suffering church in the world because of faithfulness, or

lose that character, and be brought to acquiesce and go on with the world.

We saw in Ephesus decline marking its state, "thou hast left thy first love." In Smyrna, persecution coming in, "the devil shall cast some of you into prison," thus brightening them up for God. And afterwards, in Pergamos, corrupting instructions going on within, and all these not with respect to individual failure, but to the corporate state of the church, it being that which was characterizing the church at certain periods of time in this dispensation. In the address to Pergamos, we find the seductive teaching going on, to corrupt what was within, but not as yet established and settled within, so that what characterized the within should be productive of evil. The motherhood of evil was now in the church.

Balaam, the false prophet, was seducing, and joining the church to the world, "thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam;" and to the "overcomer," the individual promise and blessing of the hidden manna, and the white stone are given. But now there is something further, "thou sufferest that woman Jezebel"—here the evil was allowed. We saw that when Balaam failed in getting God to curse Israel, he then tried to bring them into trouble through association in evil with the people of the adversary. This has now succeeded in the professing church.

In Thyatira, therefore, we have a still more terrible state of things than in Pergamos. There was not only the evil teaching—those who "hold the doctrine of Balaam"—but a person established within, having children of this seduction; not merely seducing God's children into it, but Jezebel was, so to speak, so much at home there, that children were born, finding their home and birth-place in the evil, yea, springing from the very corruption itself. But then mark, with this increased evil and wickedness, we find also increased energy on the part of the faithful ones; for God had a remnant in the midst of the evil, whose faithfulness

shone out the brighter by reason of the dense darkness around. We see this exemplified in Israel's history. In the midst of idolatry, worshipping the golden calf, or under a persecuting Jezebel, men of power, like Elijah and Elisha, were raised up in a special power of testimony for God ; thus manifesting that God was and is ever sufficient for His people's need.

When evil is at such a height as to make it impossible for the faithful ones to go along with it, then they get into a more advanced state of knowledge and power in separation from it (although it may be one of much more trial) than they had when the church was in a more prosperous condition. In the times of Elijah, God preserved His name in a most special way. The whole nation of Israel had got so dreadfully bad, that God would be obliged to cut them off ; but the time had not yet come. But in the time of Elijah they had nothing rightly in order ; there was neither temple, nor sacrifice, nor priesthood at Mount Carmel ; nevertheless, God was there for the faithful few, in a way that the people at Jerusalem had not the knowledge and enjoyment of ; for the mighty power of God was there to give testimony to the word of His prophet. And so, again, with Moses ; he went on faithfully with the Lord, while Israel was failing all round him. It was not when Israel was going on well that Moses was the nearest to God, but when they had gone all wrong ; when the golden calf was made, then "Moses took the tabernacle and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp," and then he went to meet with God, and there "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." And we find God referring to this in Numbers xii., as gloriously distinguishing Moses ; when Aaron and Miriam spake against Moses, and not to Moses's going up to God on Mount Sinai, God says, "Were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses, who is faithful in all mine house, with him will I speak mouth to mouth."

When Moses met God in the tabernacle outside the camp, he was more excellent, so to speak, than when God called him to the top of Mount Sinai. Indeed, we find it a constant principle in scripture, that where there is most manifest and universal failure, there God brings out in His faithful ones far greater testimony and power than had been known in the body as a whole, thus shewing, as Jethro says, "In the thing wherein they dealt proudly [by their sin and rebellion against God] God was above them" in grace and power. It was so in the time of the Lord Jesus, who was a most blessed and glorious example of this principle; being the Lord Himself, who brought out the fullest and most blessed testimony of grace and righteousness to bear upon the ways of the world and of His own people, at the moment of Israel's and the world's darkest and deepest sin of crucifying God's Son; for at the very time that Israel's heart was made fat—when they were in a condition to receive seven other spirits more wicked than him that had of old possessed them, ready to merge into that last state which was worse than the first; then God, who had spoken to them in divers manners by sacrifice, and type, and prophets, spoke to them by His Son, in the person of the meek and lowly Jesus.

This is the case when Jezebel is come in here at Thyatira. "I know thy works, and the last to be more than the first." The effect of the condition of the professing church was to drive saints into a kind of energy they had not before known. So, indeed, has it ever been in the history of the church in what has been called "the dark ages." We find the most faithful testimony, such a measure of devotedness (which I am sure I should be glad to see now in any way) unknown at other times, men hazarding their lives to witness for God; but how little of this in this our day of ease and slothfulness.

"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience and thy works, and the last to

be more than the first." Here we get the love and the faith working, which were wanting in Ephesus ; and now the Lord says, I will encourage them with "hope," so that we get faith, hope, and charity, the three great principles of Christianity ; although not produced in their own happy order, as in Thessalonians, still they are all here in a way. And mark how quick-sighted God always is to take notice of the good things, and that before He speaks of the evil things.

We get this character of judgment in Christ here. "These things, saith the Son of God, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass." Fire is a symbol of unfailing judgment ; this penetrated everywhere, as the eye of God. But what does He first see ? He sees at once, no doubt, through this terrible evil ; but He notices first what delights His heart in these poor saints. that nobody cared anything about. He sees that which is delightful to Himself in this despised few : and while His feet, like unto fine brass, mark the unchangeable character of that righteousness which God, in His spiritual dealings with, and claims upon man, manifests down here, and which sustains His sure and infallible judgment. Hence, the altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle was of brass, and which in man were divinely accomplished in Christ, and characterized His person ; yet the eye of God always rests upon the very least spark of faithfulness in the midst of evil, there is not one throb of the heart that beats true to Himself, in the midst of abounding iniquity, that passes unheeded by Him ; and this is what sustains the heart in the midst of untoward circumstance. And happy it is for us to know (in the simplicity of faith) and realize in power in our souls, the full meaning of those two little words, "I know," thus walking in the happy consciousness that the eye of God is upon our walk and ways.

Verse 20. "I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel," &c. Now the church, taken as a whole, is characterized by suffering

the evil; it is not now as before, "thou canst not bear them that are evil;" there was now the full public allowance of this spirit of evil which was in the church. This was going much farther down the scale than merely having the evil teaching among them: "thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants." They suffered a woman, having a professed character in the church, "who calleth herself a prophetess"—a false one surely, yet one who professed to hold and teach the word of God in the church. "I gave her space to repent, and she repented not." Thus we see God does not all at once deal in judgment with her, but gives her time for repentance; He has patience with her, but she does not repent. He was not dealing with the heathen here; to them He preaches the gospel, that their souls may be won to Christ; but here was one who called herself a prophetess in the church, teaching God's servants to "commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols," and God deals with her on this ground of her profession. He "gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not," therefore He must execute judgment. And mark, that there is no mention made here of a candlestick. He gave her space to repent; but it is not said here, "I will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent"—for Jezebel is not, indeed, acknowledged as a candlestick. There are two characters of judgment, for they were not all the children of Jezebel. To commit adultery is a common figure in scripture for tampering with evil, particularly idolatrous evil, because it was God's people giving themselves to others than Him. First, "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds:" secondly, "and I will kill her children with death." There are those that are not her children, but people who have to say to her, who are content to associate and have fellowship with the evil. Then I will punish, they shall

eat the fruit of their ways: "and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." I will see who are content to float down the stream with the evil, or who make a stand in faithfulness to me. They that have committed adultery with her, that have tampered with this spirit of false prophecy, "I will cast into great tribulation, except they repent;" but those who are her children, who have got their christian place and name in virtue of this false doctrine, they shall have full judgment, "I will kill her children with death." It is not merely tribulation for them, for they are objects of full and complete judgment; time having been given them for repentance, those that are born of her shall be visited with immediate judgment, "I will kill them with death." Then how sad it is, how very sad, to see Christians, as we often do, tampering with such evil! Take, for instance, the Galatians; there were saints there who were tampering with Judaism, who wanted to bring in the law; it is not that they were not Christians, but they were mixed up with that which was utterly hateful to God. Paul, therefore, says to them, "I stand in doubt of you," though afterwards his faith links them with their risen Head, and in virtue of Christ's unfailing grace, and their completeness in Him, he says, "I have confidence in you through the Lord." It requires great watchfulness, for the soul is ever in danger of being mixed up with principles which God utterly hates. In Colossians they were not holding the head; they were putting something between the head and the members. The apostle Paul is in an agony when he sees anything coming in to separate the saint from his immediate, proper, and personal connection with Christ. If it be a true Christian that is thus tampering with evil, he must be put into tribulation, to be brightened up for God; and if he be not converted, then there is nothing before him but judgment. So all who, in the public christian world of the day, tamper with the corruption of Christianity, represented by Jezebel in

Thyatira, will be cast into desperate distress, if they repent not of their deeds. It is a very solemn thought, but a true one, that God having taught the saints that they are one with Christ, he who puts anything whatsoever between them and the head, virtually denies Christianity. It was the great truth given to the Apostle Paul to unfold, it was what he received specially from the Lord, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest;" therefore it was that it put Paul's mind into an agony whatever it might be, whether works of the law, priesthood, or anything else which, coming in between the soul and Christ, denied the great truth he had learned, the very truth that he was converted to, that the church was one with Christ, members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

This blessed truth, held in the simplicity of faith, gives power to the soul, and sweeps everything else away; and it also sweeps through the whole course of the Christian's daily life, if he has anything between his soul and Christ. If I were a Jew I should want something on the earth, and some one between me and the God whom I obscurely know; but I am a Christian, and therefore all I want is in heaven. But, again, if I am a Christian, I am united to Christ, I am one with Him; if, therefore, united to Him, one with Him, nothing whatever can come between us, so that in attempting to bring in anything between us, it is actually setting aside Christianity altogether. Many Christians would be dreadfully frightened did they know how many things they are putting between themselves and Christ, thus virtually denying their oneness with Christ in heaven. If you would bring a priest on earth between me and God, any other than Christ in heaven, you at once destroy my privilege, for if Christ be a priest, and I am one with Him, I must be a priest also: but is this priesthood carried on on the earth? No; the place of this priesthood is in heaven. An earthly priesthood doubly denies Christianity. It makes the system and standing earthly, and denies our

association with Christ. If I were a Jew I should go to an earthly temple, and rightly so; but being a Christian, when I go to God it must be in heaven. Being one with Christ, I can have no place of worship on the earth, though my body may be there, Christ Himself being east out of it. I am in heaven, and if I am to use any priest on the earth, I must leave heaven to come down to use it there. The priesthood is exercised in the place to which it belongs. An earthly priesthood was suitable, where God was between the cherubim behind the veil, on earth. A heavenly one has its place of exercise in heaven. Yes, dear friends, if our souls are washed in Christ's blood, everything we can possibly want is in heaven. "Our life is hid with Christ in God;" and then, necessarily, such "a High Priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." The good Lord only give His own blessed truth more power in our souls, and then all the questionings of earthly priesthood, ordinances, and the like, would soon vanish. I must have a true priest in heaven, or not have a true Christ for my soul.

Now mark the character God takes. "I am he that searcheth the hearts and the reins." You shall not escape me, and however plausible the evil may be, and however you may put the name of the Lord upon it (as Israel did Jehovah to the golden calf, when they said, "These be thy gods, O Israel," "to-morrow is a feast to Jehovah," Exodus xxii. 5), still it will meet with full judgment, because you have put my saints lower than I have put them in Christ, and have idolatrously corrupted the truth of God.

Verse 24. From this verse and onward the Lord is taking up the faithful remnant, and therefore we find Him taking another way of dealing. "But unto you, I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine [in committing fornication, and eating things sacrificed unto idols], and which have not known the depths of Satan, I will put upon you none other

burden." This abstaining from the evil, though very blessed, still is not the soul growing up from strength to strength into its full portion in Christ, "but that which ye have, hold fast." I am going to "kill her children with death, but that which ye have hold fast till I come." This is what He now directs their faith, the eye of their souls, to, His coming. He does not expect them to get back to the point from whence the church departed, but directs them onward to His coming. I am going to execute judgment. "I will kill her children with death," therefore you must not expect Jezebel to get right, or to be in the condition of a candlestick; no, your eye must rest upon another thing, and here comes in the hope. Still, it is not presented in the form of the bright and blessed hope they got at the first, as in the Thessalonians, where they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." It now has a different character, being presented as a refuge to the faithful, because "in the place where righteousness should have been, behold iniquity was there." This is the comfort held out in the midst of the wreck of everything, "till I come." The Lord does own the "works, and charity, and service, and faith, and patience," that do exist. You have only got this little now, "but that which ye have, hold fast till I come." It is one thing to have the coming of the Lord presented as a relief to a faithful few, in the midst of the evil and corruptions of the Jezebel state of the church, and another and very different thing to have it as the bright and blessed hope of the church to sustain it and to lift it out of the corruptions of the world. But it is not merely the fact of His coming, the brightness of Himself who comes, can alone satisfy the heart's desire.

Verse 26-28. Now He opens out the consequences of His coming to the nations and to the church. "To him will I give power over the nations." This is a remarkable expression, and we do not find any such

when the church was in full prosperity ; but now, when the professing church has got into the position of being the greatest possible trial to the saint, and its association with the world has made that which bears its name the mother of children of corruption, the faithful ones in the midst of it all have special promises on which to stay their souls. We know from history how, in the darkest times, men of faith have had to wend their way through evil in the church, and fearing detection by those who called themselves by that name, and under bitter persecution from the ruling power in the earth ; the nominal church being really Satan's power by corruption exercised through the nations. And so it is here : the saints having faith and patience, go on persevering through every difficulty ; if it be Jezebel and her children, with the name of the church on the one side, and persecution of the nations on the other. The promise is, association with Jesus Himself, the bright and morning star, and where there has been faith in this, there shall be power over the nations. The world that, under Satan's power, has been the trial of saints shall be subjected to them. " He that overcometh and keepeth my works *unto the end* (in the midst of that corruption which has still the name and responsibility of a church), to him will I give power over the nations." In Matthew xxiv. we get the same thing as to principle, though not as applying to the same point of time. " He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." And " I will give him the morning star." Thus He is giving to the faithful remnant, while in this condition, the special consciousness of union with Himself. The difficulty of the position in which they found themselves was, that all around them were turning to Jezebel and her corruption, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. And then they cry, " What am I to do ?" To which the Lord replies, " Follow me—keep my works *unto the end*," and then you shall have my portion at the end, " even as I received of my Father."

We see here, in the promise made to the faithful, two characters of the coming of the Lord pointed out. The first regards their position as to the world: it is as "power over the nations;" then, secondly, their own proper blessing, the morning star. With regard to the first, there is a reference to it in Psalm ii. 9. The church of the living God, in its walk on this earth, ought to have judged the world, but now, having committed fornication with the world, it has no power to judge it, therefore the Lord says, "I must;" for the church, having failed in the holiness and separateness of its walk to condemn the world, the Lord must give testimony to what the world is in judgment. (See Ps. ii.) If the persecuted ones bowed to the authority of the world, as ordained of God, still, morally they were separated from it. And from the corruption of Jezebel they stood wholly aloof with horror, let Jezebel's influence be what it might. They were honoured by being martyred. The powers of the world at the close will be associated against God's anointed, but, in spite of all, He will take His power over the nations. And what is the church's place and portion there? Christ is now sitting on the right hand of God, and the Holy Ghost is come down to gather the church; and after the saints are taken to the Lord, then He will come forth and judge the world. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion"—"I will declare the decree"—"Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Son is not used here in the character of eternal Son of the Father, but, as born in the world, the man set up in glory to rule over the earth. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance." Christ is not doing this now; He is not now praying for the world. The moment He asks God in respect of it, judgment on the world must ensue. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron." In John xvii. Christ says, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." He leaves it out of His requests. He is not now breaking the nations in pieces,

but is sending forth His blessed gospel to gather souls out of the world, and the Holy Ghost is sent down to join them to Himself, thus forming the church. But when He asks for the nations, it will be to dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. This will be the judgment of the living. And hence the word of warning at the close of Psalm ii., "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings," &c.—"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry;" for if you do not bow to this summons, thus giving you in patience opportunity to repent, you must bow to the wrath of the Lamb. "To me every knee shall bow." And mark here what the church's portion is, as one with Christ. "To him that overcometh will I give power over the nations," &c., as I have received of my Father. And of Christ it is said, "He shall rule them with a rod of iron." The world must be set right, and He will execute judgment upon it, and when He comes to do it the church will be associated with Him in it; but now she is dwelling where Satan's seat is, with evil on every side, and cannot touch it by way of setting it right. And therefore it is as if Christ should say to His faithful remnant, "Do not you be afraid, do not you be uneasy on account of persecutions, nor yet about the corruptions of Jezebel, only 'keep my works unto the end.'" This is the time of patience and lowly faithfulness. Do you walk through the world as I walked through Israel, "and I will give you power over the nations," "even as I have received of my Father." The power shall be yours when I take mine and reign. This is the special character of association with Christ in power.

But meanwhile, what are we to do as regards setting the world right? Nothing; and this the flesh cannot understand. We are not to meddle with the raging of the heathen, nor yet to concern ourselves with the alliances of nations (while still remembering that we have to submit to the powers that be, as ordained of God, and obey them), nor yet to defile ourselves by touching the evils of Jezebel, but to wait on God. "Keep my works

unto the end," and wait patiently, for when Christ shall have the upper hand so shall we. Our interests are His, and His are ours; they are so enwrapped together that they cannot be sundered. The force of that expression in Colossians, "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" is just this: He is hid in God, and so am I; that is the reasoning; His life is ours. "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." He so refers our state to His, that if He is hid in God, we are hidden too. And if His appearing is spoken of, "when he shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory;" thus being entirely one with Christ while He is waiting on the Father's throne, we are called to wait with Him in spirit down here. And here I might notice by the way, that in Psalm cx. there may be some explanation of the expression, "of that day knoweth no man, neither the Son." The Son is sitting at the right hand of God, and is looked at prophetically as waiting there, as Jehovah said unto Him, "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Therefore, in this sense the Son, as prophetic minister of revealed truth, and as such He spoke in Israel (see Heb. i.), may be said not to know the day nor the hour, for, as Paul says, in Hebrews x., "He is from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool," when they will be made ours also; wherefore, in the address to Philadelphia, we are called upon to keep the word of His patience, and if He is waiting, it is no wonder that we have to wait also; and it is *Himself* that is the very best part of what we wait for. This is the proper and peculiar portion of the church—association with Him; the other, that is the power over the nations, is merely the fruit and consequence of it. He must judge, but to you He is the "morning star." Judgment is His "strange work." He is slow to wrath, but He must execute judgment, because He cannot allow iniquity to go on for ever; for He is going to take

possession of His own throne, and He cannot have a throne in connection with Satan and his evil, and therefore He must put the evil down, for He cannot allow it; so that anti-christian power in the world must be cast down, as He cannot set up His own throne and let that exist. As it is said in Psalm xciv. 20, "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?" It could not be. Therefore He must do His strange work: but His proper work, so to speak, is to shine in His own heavenly brightness—our proper place to be associated with Him there. "I will give him the morning star." And who is it that sees the morning star? He who watches while it is night. All see the sun in its brightness; but those only who are not of the night, yet knowing that morally it is night, and are looking for the morning star—those, and those only, see the morning star, and get it as their portion. They are children, not of the night, but of the day, and therefore look they for the day. When the star rose that hailed Jesus, who was born king of the Jews, there were Annas and Simeons waiting for the consolation of Israel. And who were Anna's friends in that day of darkness? Simply those who were looking for redemption in Israel, and to them she spake of Him. In them was made good that word in Malachi—"They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." We see they knew each other, and they enjoyed the comfort in spirit by the truth of Jesus of what follows in the prophet. "To you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." These were a poor despised few, who were but little known, and less cared for; but they were "waiting" for redemption in Israel, sensible of the ruin and of the evil, because alive to God's glory and to the privilege of being His people. In them, feeble as they were, we find a much brighter mark of faith than we do in Elijah when he was calling down fire from heaven. They were not setting the temple right, but were speaking together of God's thoughts. Elijah was setting

outward things to rights, but had not faith for inside things.* In God's unfailing grace to the remnant he had no just confidence. Law was the measure of his apprehension; but the Annas and Simeons had the secret of God in their souls ("The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant"), and were walking in the narrow and silent path of faith, not setting the temple right, but speaking to all that were waiting for consolation in Israel. But were they content with the state of things? No; but in separation from evil, they waited for the consolation of Israel, which could alone set the evil right. And just so it is in our day, the Christian cannot change Jezebel, nor can he be mixed up with the mere temple-worshippers, the so-called religious systems of the day. He walks, while leaving them to the judgment of the Lord, far from violent attacks upon them, in quiet separation from all the evil, patiently waiting and watching during the long, dark night of sorrow, for the morning star of the day of glory. "To him that overcometh will I give the morning star," and this morning star is Christ Himself. And He is in this way known to those who, though in the night, yet are not of the night, being children of the day. The morning star is gone before the world sees the sun, before the sun rises, before the day appears. But before the sun rises there is the morning star for those who are watching in the night. The world will see the sun, but the morning star is gone, so far as the world is concerned, before the sun rises. So we shall be gone to be with the morning

* Note the character of Christ here. Perfect under the law Himself, He, by the unfailing patience of His grace, bearing all things, makes good the bringing of the voice of the shepherd to every sheep in the fold. Poor Elijah, devoted as he was, brings down fire on the disobedient, but does not reach the seven thousand that God knew. Christ refuses to bring down fire. He bears the judgment while He kept the law, and at all cost made Jehovah's voice reach the poorest, most guilty, most hidden of the flock. The consequence is, as indeed the cause, the sheep of the flock are His, and all power of judgment is given to Him over all.

star before the day of Christ appears to the world ; and when Christ shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.

There are three passages which refer to this morning star, to which it is important to refer you. In 2 Peter i. he says, " We have also a more sure (that is, confirmed) word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." Israel's prophets had prophesied the full day of blessing on the earth, saying, " Arise, shine, for thy light is come." " A King shall reign in righteousness." And their testimony was confirmed to the disciples by the vision on the holy mount. They prophesied, too, of events coming on the world, which marked out its judgment in all its forms of rebellious will and power, of Nineveh and Babylon, and the beasts which should arise upon the earth—of Jerusalem and its portion, as departed from God ; and judgment was thus pointed out, so that there was a warning light, which in the midst of the darkness of this world itself gave a light which recalled him that gave heed to it to avoid the crime of human will which led on to divine judgment. And this they did well to take heed to, until the day-star arose in their hearts, because it was the light in a dark place. But the day-star itself was something yet more excellent.

The prophecies, indeed, are plain, their warning clear ; they guard me from being mixed up with the spirit of the world, whose judgment is announced. In Revelation I read of unclean spirits like frogs, going forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. If I do not even exactly understand who and what the frogs mean, still, the grand import of the prophecy is evident ; they are not the power of good ; they lead the kings of the earth to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. It is thus a light shining in a dark place, the night of this world's his-

tory on the absence of Christ. But the morning-star is Christ Himself, as we see in Revelation xxii. He is the bright and morning star. He will be the Sun of Righteousness to the world when He appears, but then there will be judgment. The wicked shall be as ashes under the soles of the feet, as stubble ; and the day of the Lord as fire. But the star appears, to them that watch, before the sun appears to the world ; for as I can understand by the prophetic warning, that this dark place is going to be judged, that "the night is far spent, and the day is at hand ;" yet so night it is now, whatever people may think. And I want the morning star in my heart (the hope of Christ before the day, coming to receive the church to Himself—for the morning star is given to them that overcome) to cheer my soul through the long and dreary night, which is yet darker now than it was then, but still far spent, as the darkness of the night always thickens till again the dawn of another day rise beyond on the other side of heaven, and the morning star appear to fix the eye of the watchful and waiting soul, and cheer the heart with a sure and certain hope. And what, then, do we want of the things of this dark place, which is now under judgment for having nailed God's Son on the cross ? Do not you, therefore, be seeking the riches, the honours, the power of this world, on which Christ is coming to execute judgment. One ray of the glory of Christ will at once wither up all the glory of this defiled world like an autumn leaf ; do not you, therefore, go on mixing yourself up with the world, heaping up riches. What will you do with them when Christ comes ? Remember the Lord is at hand. But do I keep separate from this world merely because it is going to be judged ? Certainly not. My whole portion, for time and eternity, is in Christ ; the day-star has arisen in my heart. I am separated from the world by affection, and not by fear.

We have the coming of Christ as the morning star, as a distinct thing from the sunrise ; for when the sun

rises upon the world, it will be for judgment. (See Is. ii.; Mal. iv. 1-3.) But beside and before all this we have our portion in Christ; we are not of this world, we are redeemed out of it, and belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and shall join Him on high before He is manifested for the judgment of this world; and therefore the thunders of judgment cannot touch us, because we are seated with Him in heaven, from whence the judgments come. In Revelation iv. we have a most blessed and comforting picture of the position of the church. There are the twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones, round about the throne, from whence the thunders, the lightnings, and the voices come: and they continue perfectly unmoved. But was this insensibility? Certainly not; for when God Himself in His holy character is mentioned, immediately they fall down, and cast their crowns before Him; neither is this holiness the cause of any fear, when the living creatures proclaim the threefold holiness of Him who sits upon the throne; it is their worship breaks forth, and they fall down and cast their crowns before Him in the full sense of the blessedness of Him who sits alone upon the throne. Christ, then, is this morning star, and if the day has dawned, and the day-star has arisen in our hearts, we know our association with Christ Himself, as within that place from which the judgment proceeds.

At the end of the Revelation we have the place of the star again. (xxii. 16.) The Lord brings us back from the prophetic testimony to Himself—"I Jesus have sent mine angel"—"I am the root and the offspring of David [this is in connection with His being source of promise, and heir of it, as King in Zion—"Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies"] and the bright and morning star." But the moment He presents Himself as the bright and morning star, "the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come;'" the Holy Ghost in the church says, "Come." This response is what is connected with Himself; the mention of Himself at-

tracts and awakens the answer of the Spirit ; this is the character in which the church herself has to say to His coming. God, in the love of His own heart, has associated the church with Jesus, and the very mention of His name awakens the cry, "Come!" for it touches a chord which gives an immediate response ; and therefore He does not say here, "Behold, I come quickly." The question here is not when He will come, but that it is Himself that is coming. He does not speak of His coming—blessed though that thought is—but He reveals Himself ; and this it is that awakens the response of the heart, by the power of the Holy Ghost. We are for Himself, and shall be with Himself—it cannot be anything short of this, for He calls us "his body." What a glorious place this is ! Not merely wonderful, but glorious—identification with the Christ of God ! No explanation of prophetic scripture, however nice and true it may be, however useful as a solemn warning as regards this world, can ever take the place in the soul that is taught of God, of knowing its living union with a coming Jesus, of the present waiting for Himself. No mere explanation of His coming as a doctrine is the proper hope of the saint. That hope is not prophecy, it is the real, and blessed, and sanctifying expectancy of a soul that knows Jesus, and waits to see and to be with Himself.

The bride alone hears the voice of the Bridegroom, which at once calls out the expression of her desire of His coming. To this He responds, assuring her of it, and then the revelation closes, leaving this as her own expectation, whatever He may have previously communicated to her concerning the judgment of this world, to which she does not belong. The Lord Jesus is represented as departing Himself, and coming and taking His bride to be with Him. Then, when the world is saying, "Peace and safety," sudden destruction cometh upon them, and they shall not escape.

Paul closes 1 Thessalonians iv. with these words, "So shall we ever be with the Lord." And is

that all? Yes, that is all; for to the heart that has learnt to love Him He can say no more. Then he adds,* "Of the times and seasons ye have no need that I write unto you." Ye are the children of the day, you wait for that. No explanation of this as a doctrine can ever reach the heart. You cannot make a person understand a relationship; to understand it he must himself be in it. An unquickened soul may understand, in a manner, what prophecy means, but nothing short of the sense and taste of being connected with Christ Himself can give the desire of His own personal coming. And why? Because for this the relationship must be known. In Revelation xxii. 16 the relationship is known, affection is awakened, and there is the immediate response. Take a case: a woman is expecting her husband; he knocks at the door; not a word is uttered out of his mouth, but his wife knows already who it is at the door, for it is he whom she loves that is there, and thus the natural feelings and affections proper for a wife are awakened, when the chord is touched by that which acts on them. But then the link must be in the heart, the affection must be there, to produce the response; the chord which vibrates with this blessed truth must be there to be awakened by it. There is such a consciousness of union with Jesus, through the power of God's Spirit, that the very moment He is spoken of in this character the chord is touched, and the instinctive cry is, "Come!" No amount of intelligence merely will produce this. And what a difference between expecting the Lord Jesus, because He has made me and His saints a part of Himself and His bride, and looking for His coming to judge poor sinners. Now mark the practical effect of this looking for Jesus; it takes us clean out of the world up to heaven. If my heart is

* I have no doubt that the direct connection of chapter v. is with verse 14 of chapter iv.; verse 15 to the end of chapter iv. is a parenthesis.

right in its affections for Him, I am looking too straight up on high to take notice of the things around me. Plenty of things there are around in the world, plenty of bustle and turmoil; but it does not disturb the blessed calm of my soul; because nothing can alter our indissoluble relationship with a coming Jesus, as nothing should divide us in hope.

To see this coming of the Lord Jesus for the church changes the character of a thousand scriptures. Take the Psalms, for instance, those which speak about judgments on the ungodly, such as "the righteous washing their feet in the blood of the wicked." We are not the persons who say this: it is the language of Jews, and of godly Jews too, who will be delivered through the rod of power smiting their enemies, when all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him. But do I want my enemies to be destroyed to get to Christ? Certainly not; I shall leave them to be with Him. (It is a sorrowful thought indeed, though we recognize the just judgment of God, that such judgment will be accomplished upon those who despise Him and His grace.) But as for me, I am going straight up to Christ in heaven. My place is in Him while He is hid in God, in the nearest and most intimate union. I belong to the bride, a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. When we have hold of this blessed centre, Christ, and with Him, therefore, of God Himself, then every scripture falls into its proper place, and we get a spiritual understanding by the Holy Ghost of things in heaven, and our connection with them, and things on earth, and our separateness from them, and, above all, our hearts get into their proper place, for, being set on Jesus Himself, we are waiting for Him. When He shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory, but we shall be for ever with the Lord.

May the Lord give us such an apprehension of redemption, and of our position in Him, as may so fix our hearts on Himself, that we may be daily walking

down here like unto men that wait for their Lord, who has promised to come and take us to Himself, watching in the midst of a night of darkness, aware that it is the night, although we are not of the night, but watching and waiting for the day, having the morning star arisen in our hearts. May the Lord keep us from idols; and, above all, from aught that savours of Jezebel, that we may be in dread, for fear of grieving Him in any of those things which have come in to spoil and corrupt that which He once planted so beautiful, to be for the manifestation of His glory in this dark and evil world.

LECTURE V.

I FEEL, beloved brethren, that the very commencement of this chapter comforts one in a peculiar manner in connection with the exceeding solemnity of the address to the church of Sardis. I know of nothing more solemn than the point of view from which the Spirit of God, in this address to Sardis, regards the professing church, as to its name, its character, and its responsibility in the world; for, while the address is to the church, the point of view from whence it is looked at is, what the Son of God is in His own fulness of blessing; since it ought to be, in the power of divine grace, the expression of His nature and power, from whom its life flows; and it is necessarily addressed to the professing church, according to the professed position it has taken. I feel ever a little difficulty in speaking on the subject, because of the sense of responsibility that presses on me; and I pray the Lord may communicate to you the sense I have (nay, and a much greater sense than I have) of the responsibility connected with it. The church of Sardis was, indeed, in a most solemn condition; still, there is a comfort in the fulness and perfectness of Christ here given for the need of the church; and when all else might seem to

fail, so much the more does Christ bring out that unchangeable fulness which is always there in Him to be depended on.

The Lord's character (which, as I have before said, is usual in these addresses) is adapted to the state of those whom He is addressing—"these things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars." It is not said here, as it is in the address to Ephesus, "He that holdeth in his right hand the seven stars," but "He that hath the seven stars." And mark, that no word in scripture is omitted or changed without full meaning. The stars (the angels*) of the seven churches are symbolical representatives of the churches; but considered in those who have a character of authority under Him, who is the Head of government. In the address to Ephesus, Christ holds all the authority in His hand, the stars, as I have just remarked, being the symbolical representatives of the whole system of authority, of that active energy which characterizes the churches to Christ's eye, which acts in His name in the midst of them, and represents them to Him; and therefore we find Him in Ephesus walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, judging the state of the church, and holding the representatives in His right hand.

But here in Sardis, failure, and even spiritual death, had come in, and characterized the state of the church,—"I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead." We have seen how failure and decay had already previously got into the church; but Sardis was, in one point of view, in a worse state than even any before her, having a name to live while

* Though such points are not my object here, I may remark (as much stress has been laid on it), in explanation, that the angel of the synagogue was in no way the ruler of the synagogue; they were rather the clerks of the synagogue. The angels may excel in strength, but are ministering spirits. The star is what gives the idea of authority, though of subordinate authority, as a symbol, not the word "angel."

she was dead. It was decay of vital power; not the power of evil working, but a morally worn-out thing; and consequently the Lord presented Himself to Sardis as having for faith all the fulness* of the Holy Ghost at His disposal—"He that hath the seven spirits of God;" and the seven stars, all power in the church, being at His disposal also, seven being the symbol of perfection. Whatever the failure of the church may be—however it may have coalesced with the world—this remains always true, that the full, divine competency of the Holy Ghost, in His various attributes, is its portion, under Him who is the Head of the church and cares for it, and loves it, and watches over it, so that the church is without excuse on the one hand, and the believing saint has a resource on the other. But now that the whole thing had completely failed, that not only God's saints were seduced by the false doctrine of Balaam, and that Jezebel had found a home there, having children born there (as of Zion it shall be said, "This and that man were born in her," so here, there were those who had their Christian name and birth-place in the very evil itself): but another scene presents itself here after the evil has fully developed itself—a deathful state, though all spiritual energy and authoritative power is there in Christ Himself, with whom they have to do; and much as the fact of all this being still and ever in Christ may condemn the professing church, the precious truth of all power in connection with the Holy Ghost being then, as ever, assuredly in Christ, is brought out for the comfort and blessing of the faithful "overcomer." It is his stay in the midst of abounding evil.

Whatever may be the form in which corruption has come in, be it Jezebel or be it Balaam, the Lord says, "I know it all." If death is stamped on the professing church, still, Christ says, "I have the seven spirits of God, and nothing can touch that;" and,

* But this I think in the activity of its ministrations.

therefore, while all is going wrong, we find that He has still all that is needed for the full blessing of the church, "hath the seven spirits of God,"—that is not altered a bit, either by the failure of man or the wickedness of Satan.

In Revelation iv. 5 ; v. 6, we have likewise mention of the seven spirits of God—seven lamps of fire burning ; seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, expressive of multiform power and manifold wisdom ; so that it is as if the Lord had said, "Here is everything that can *produce* good, and *secure* good, and I have it all in my keeping." In Thyatira He had been obliged to teach them to look out for His coming as the only refuge in the midst of evil ; and this hope is brought in as the bright and morning star, to light up the soul in the midst of surrounding darkness. Then, in the church of Sardis, where they had a name to live when they were dead, He further comforts the faithful ones with the assurance, that, as to the real source of all strength, there is not any failure. If all outward supply is gone, He is still the same, and now He will make this known to the church as the power to sustain and support the faithful few, but He does not work a miracle for their deliverance. So likewise, we may observe, when Israel set up the golden calf, there was no miracle wrought to meet that failure, but there was spiritual power in Moses, when he put the tabernacle outside the camp.

The prophets in Judah prophesied, but they wrought no miracles, except when the sun-dial of Ahaz returned ten degrees backward as a special sign given to Hezekiah. They testified in order to bring man back to publicly acknowledge truth in a divinely established system, and comfort the hearts of the faithful. But when the whole nation of Israel had openly departed from God under Jeroboam, and at length Baal was set up and worshipped, then God worked miracles by the hands of His servants Elijah and Elisha. So that while in mercy and grace God was always sending tes-

timony after testimony to Judah, but no miracle—when open failure came in, His power must be shewn to prove that He was Jehovah, in contrast with Baal, which Judah did not deny. Power with corrupt holders of truth would corrupt them more; power as testimony to those gone away is the patient goodness of God. This is a great principle in the ways of God, and it is of this great principle that I am speaking, rather than of there being miracles.* The great practical principle is established, that we may always reckon upon God, whatever the failure may be. It is true that we cannot but be sensible of failure, and a deep sense we ought to have of it, while, at the same time, we must never suffer the utter sense of man's failure to dim the eye of faith to the consciousness of Christ's power; it should rather turn more definitely and distinctly to that which can never fail; thus we can look with calmness on the church's failure, because we look at it from our dwelling in that love which can never fail; but still we must care for it, and deeply feel it, as being dishonouring to the Lord. Take, for instance, the Apostle Paul; how entirely he got above the position of the failing Corinthians and Galatians when he got up to the spring of confidence in the Lord; see how shockingly the Corinthians had been going on when Paul wrote to them. There was "such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles," therefore he had to reprove them, but he looked above their actual state to the source of their life and hope; and therefore, before he touches upon their evil, he can speak to them of their being "confirmed unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ;" for "God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." So also to the Galatians; when Paul wrote to them, he

* Moses wrought them as a proof of his mission, as nothing was then divinely established in Israel. But this is not our subject here. It is the same principle. The Jewish prophets appealed to what was established.

said, "I stand in doubt of you;" for they had got under the law, and therefore Paul asks, must he change his voice—wants to know how he should speak to them, for they were off the christian ground of grace, and accordingly turns to speak to them according to the law. But when he gets up to Christ, then his heart gets to the spring of confidence—not confidence in them, but about them—and then he could say, "I have confidence in you through the Lord, that you will be none otherwise minded." The right state of our souls is to have a just value for, and apprehension of, all that is in Christ, and consequently of all that the church ought to be for Christ, in order to have a deeper sense of its failure, according to that which we see in Christ, of which it ought to be the faithful and fruit-bearing witness, and then the sense of the failure will augment, and not diminish, our confidence in the Lord Jesus. And this it is that will keep the saint steady and quiet through it all, because our confidence is not in what the church ought to be for Christ, but in what Christ is for it.

Mark, then, the graciousness of the Lord, in the way in which He opens this address to Sardis. Before He touches on their terrible state, He first of all presents Himself as still possessing the plenary power of the Spirit, for the resource of faith; so that, notwithstanding all the failure and evil that had come in, the power and prevalency of the Spirit still remained the same, because it depended not upon the walk of the saint down here, but upon the value of Christ's work above. Just as God spake to Israel of old, when they had failed, by the mouth of Haggai the prophet, saying, "According to the word which I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." And so it is here—"These things, saith he that *hath* the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars." Then He goes on to take up the state of the church—"I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead." What a

terrible condition is this—it completely portrays what we see all around us ; I do not mean only at the present day, but what has actually been the state of the church for the last century and more.

In Sardis it is not the church as having left her first love, as in Ephesus, although that has been the origin of all that has since followed. Nor is it as Smyrna, suffering under persecution from Satan, who has the power of the world. Nor is it as Pergamos, dwelling in that same world where his throne is, having such as hold the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes, a doctrine allowing evil deeds. Nor is it as Thyatira, suffering the prophetess Jezebel to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. Nor has it yet arrived at the state of Laodicea, just ready to be spued out ; nor is it like Israel, as the open and positive worshippers of Baal ; grace has still some work to do, and therefore we find it acting here and there. The church of Sardis, as we have seen, had got away from evil doctrine and the actual teaching of corruption ; the evil of Sardis was more *negative*—a dead form without any living power. It has a great name to live, certainly. It is not Jezebel here, nor eating things offered to idols, neither is it yet spued out of Christ's mouth ; they had got outward truth, but it was dead, having no living power ; they had a certain outward and avowed profession and appearance of Christianity ; but, alas ! if there were the name to live, there was no power of life. They held the name and doctrine of Christianity, but, alas ! Christ was not there ! Take orthodoxy as it now is, and has been for some time past, and is it not just this—saved from Jezebel, a dead form has come in ? And here let us bear in mind what we have before remarked, that in these addresses to the churches, nothing of that which is put under judgment has any reference to the energy of the Holy Ghost working. The thing that is judged is the use made of these graces and gifts of the Spirit of God.

Take the work of the Reformation as an illustration of this: there, as to the energy that produced, it was an undoubted work of God's Spirit; and we find with joy what God was *doing*, and not what He is *judging*. It is from not seeing this distinction that people get into difficulty. Now, it may be asked, where is the fruit which should have been produced by the privileges brought in at the Reformation, and now so long enjoyed? God lights a candle, not to put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all who are in the house; then God looks to see if it gives forth the light which He has put into it. In the churches we find a good or a bad state spoken of, but never is the good state named in connection with the Holy Ghost as producing it.

"I have not found thy works perfect before God." It was set up complete in all the perfectness that there was in Christ for it; and therefore He looks for that which should answer to it, the perfectness in which it was originally set. Thus the Lord presents Himself as the One having all this perfectness in spiritual power and energy, and is looking for that which answers to it. We might say, "Is it not strange to say their works were not perfect, when we are told they are dead?" No, for the Lord never can descend below His own measure in dealing with evil, whether in the church or with an individual. If He gives a standard, it is that by which He must judge. The church must be judged according to the resources it has at its disposal. God never goes below this in looking for an answer to what He has done; therefore we have to ask ourselves whether, as individuals, we are shewing to the world the *holiness* that we are made partakers of, and the *love* we are the objects of. There are very many who *profess* Christ, while there are few comparatively who *live* Christ. There is no charge here of Balaam and his corrupt doctrine, eating things sacrificed to idols, or of Jezebel; but the Lord is looking for *life*. He looks for works complete, filled up according to the measure

of grace with which He has connected the church. If we look at ourselves, dear friends, what can we say? The question is not whether we are producing any fruit at all, but whether the fruits that are produced are fruits meet for Him by whom the ground is dressed. If I till a field, and sow it with wheat, and it does not bring forth according to my labours bestowed upon it, I must give it up, and I do not sow it with wheat any more. I am not here talking about the salvation of a soul, but of the Lord's judgment of the results in the saints in souls already saved.

It is true that God *will* produce the fruits of every principle of His grace, in perfection, when Christ takes His power; but before this He commits it to man. He gave the law to Israel, and they utterly failed respecting it, but Christ says, "Thy law have I hid in my heart;" so also of Israel, God will, in the latter days, write the law in their hearts. Now Israel hath become "a proverb and a bye-word among all nations," as having been unfaithful; but in the day of Christ's power, when God will produce fruit in perfection and fulness, then "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the whole world with fruit."

Then take government, that was put into man's hand. Nebuchadnezzar was entrusted with power, and we know what became of it; but government will be set up in perfection when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." So, also, the church of God was set up complete in Christ on the earth, to manifest the glory of her absent Head in heaven, and the power of the Holy Ghost conferred upon her. She was the habitation of God through the Spirit; but, alas! how miserably has she failed, and what God is looking for are the fruits of grace as a testimony and witness to His grace received. But when Christ "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe," then the church shall be manifested in glory, and the world shall learn that the church has been loved with the same love

wherewith Christ was loved. But now it is a matter of responsibility, and this for each individual, if the church fails. It will come to this, as to the professing church, that it will be spued out of His mouth. But remember, this is not a question of salvation, but of profession before the world.

Take the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost was given to produce certain effects. There the adequate fruits were produced. As to the present time, then the enquiry, of course, is, Is the church of God producing for God fruits which answer to the power of testimony entrusted to it? No, the church as a body is not. Then comes out the individuality, "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear;" and this brings the question home to each one of us, "How far are we individually producing a testimony to God's grace?"—a testimony, I mean, not in accordance with the fullness of public power manifested in the church, but filling up the measure of what we have individually received, and the spiritual service of a saint, according to Christ's power now; for so God in practice deals with the church, and the grace in Christ is always sufficient for that. When this is the question between the soul and God, surely we shall have to own that this individual measure of grace received is not attained to. We may, indeed, zealously contend for a *name*, but the question before God is as to power and full fruits of grace in the measure of that which has been received; and if the soul does not come up to that, it is a dreadful thing for it to be resting in a religious reputation, while the works are not perfect before God. O may the Lord keep us all from resting upon a religious reputation; for of all the terrible things that can befall a saint of God, one of the worst is trusting in a religious reputation, especially for one who is engaged in ministering, I am sure. Alas! how often we have seen such a person labouring devotedly, diligently, blessed in his labours, gathering others really in truth to Christ, but thus gathering a circle round himself. Self is there,

and thus he gets "a name to live," becoming satisfied with the circle he has made, and resting in the fruits produced, and not in Him who is alone the power of life; thus his usefulness is gone, and he himself stops short of the end. Look now at the direct contrast of this in the Lord's earthly path. He lost credit, every step he took, with those around Him, because He went on walking with His Father, shining brighter and brighter, till at last men could not bear its brightness, and, as far as they were concerned, put it out on the cross, because those around Him knew not His measure of communion, and could not at all get up to it; even His very disciples could not come up to what discipleship involved; they also dropped off, as He said, "Ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Thus we see the blessed Lord in man's estimation get lower and lower, till they put Him to death, "even the death of the cross."

Then there was Paul. What spiritual energy of faith there was in him! He walked with God in power; but we see that those about Him could not attain to the point he had reached; and therefore, as Paul was advancing, he must necessarily leave them behind him. His path became more and more lonely, and at the end of his course he had to say, "all they which are in Asia be turned away from me." Again, "all men forsook me, notwithstanding the Lord stood by me." Paul, out of all he had gathered, had only one person to visit him in prison. Full energy was kept up in Paul, in the power of which he walked with God, while others slipped back; as he says, they were "the enemies of the cross of Christ," "who mind earthly things." And even those who were not this, were not keeping up to the point of faith; they lost sight of their heavenly citizenship; they sought their own more than the things of Jesus Christ.

Just in proportion as there is this secret measure of communion in our walk with God, in that which is

hourly passing between the soul and God, will be the degree of our *isolation*. What we have most specially to look to is, that all our works be perfect before God, that all our doings be measured with immediate reference to God; and this must necessarily produce a certain degree of isolation. It was thus with Christ: He was always lowly and He was always lonely, yet full of love to all; perfect in affability with every needy soul as with His disciples. It is no matter how we sink in the estimation of others, it will be the necessary consequence of faithfulness; and the reverse of this is, with a great show before the world, just this, "that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead," "for I have not found thy works perfect before God:" the works are done in reference to man, and not to God. At the same time it is quite a right thing to walk with, and to keep and cultivate the affections of, the saints, although the more faithful the individual walk is, the greater the isolation must be, because the fewer there will be who understand it. And yet the nearer to Christ, the greater, of course, will be the grace towards others, as He says, "as I have loved you," that you also should love one another. Thus, in a close walking with God, there will be an abiding sense of His secret favour; but then this personal dependence upon God must lead to isolation. Our path will be a lonely one, as Christ's ever was. With all His grace and lowliness, to listen to all, and to serve all, yea, even to the washing of our feet, yet He was left alone, though not left of God, as He said, "He that sent me is with me, the Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please him."

Now see the consequences of the works not being perfect before God; and this is what I feel to be so solemn in the warning here given. "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." Mark the *two* points here, "*received and heard*." First, the grace which it has received, and in which it has been set; and, secondly, the revealed

word of God as their rule and guide. Grace has been received, and the word communicated. It is not that which we have *not* received, but that which we have received, that we are called to consider. The Lord presents the measure of responsibility in these two points, that which the church has received, and in which it has been set, and that which it has *heard*; the word of God being the alone measure of revealed guidance; God gives us His word to guide us, and grace to walk according to it.

“If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” Now it is a very wearying and tiring thing to watch, for one has to watch oneself too, or we are apt to fall asleep. The heart grows tired of being constantly awake to all that is going on. It is impossible to watch if we do not keep close to Christ; if we have not the sense of His watching us, and taking notice of us. We need great watchfulness in active service; indeed, our every service ought to be connected with God as a matter of individual faith. We may be tried in it, the bush may be very thick, but the object on the other side should be clear. There is a constant tendency to slip away from that clearness of judgment about a thing, which we should have if close to Christ. When judging of a trial in the presence of Christ, the way out of it seems easy; but when we have got into the trial we do not always see it so clearly. When we are first descending into a valley, the object on the other side, and the direction to be taken, is seen clearly enough, but when we have got into the thicket of the valley, it is not so easy to discern the pathway through the details of the way. We are apt, when we get into the weariness and distraction of the circumstances of the trial, to lose the clearness of apprehension which we had in judging of it in Christ's presence. We all find there is much practical difficulty in seeing as clearly when in the thicket of the valley as when on the heights with Christ. Our eye must be single to do

God's will; and the more humble we are, the more simple we shall be, and thus be guided through by the wisdom of His own will, who sees the end from the beginning, and guides us by His word and Spirit. The largest mind of man that was ever heard of, could never discern God's ways, while the "little child" who looks to God has God's wisdom. Every step we take should be marked with the sense of God's approbation. "For them that are meek will he guide in judgment, and such as are gentle will he teach his way."

"If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come on thee." If there is not this watchfulness in the professing church, how solemn is the result. "I will come on thee as a thief." What a fearful thing when the professing church, with its great name, is reduced, in God's estimation and judgment, to the level of the world, when it does not come up in its works to the expectation of God. He had not found their works perfect before God, because not according to the privileges given by God. God here says to them, if there be not the answer to what I have given, if there is not watchfulness, I must treat you as the world will be treated. In 1 Thessalonians v. 2, with regard to the world, it is said, "the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." But to the saints it is said, "but ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief;" "ye are the children of the light and the children of the day." And when He comes who brings in the day, the children of the day will come with Him; they will be, in fact, as the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory," "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe." And, again, "The glory thou hast given me, I have given them, that the world may know that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me." In 1 Thessalonians v. the Spirit of God contrasts the world with the church

of God ; while here, in Sardis, the Lord contrasts the professing church with the true saints of God, and announces to it the world's portion ; therefore Sardis is addressed as the world ; it is not denounced as Jezebel, but as receiving the judgment of what it is in spirit, the world ; for if the professing church is not coming up to the measure of what it has " received and heard," this is its portion. If it be not found watching, it is courting in its measure the same judgments as the world. Of course, we are not saying that the church of God, which is one with Christ in glory, and whose life is hid with Christ in God, could ever be so treated ; but it is an exceedingly solemn thought that the great professing body, with its " great name to live," and a " fair show in the flesh," is waiting for the same judgment as the world. It is the world itself, *in fact*. Then arises this question, How far have your souls realized that all that is going on around us bearing the name of God, while it is not of God ; the nominal church, or Christendom, as it is called, which is, in truth, the world, but having this name and position ; will be treated as what it really is, the world. Well, then, dear friends, what a solemn fact is this, that we are in this day in which we live walking through a scene which must thus be visited, because God has said it, and, alas ! we know not *how soon*. I know of nothing more solemn than the identification of the professing church with the world in judgment which is here found.

"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." Here we shall have another important point opened out, for here we shall find the characteristics of what is called the "*invisible church*." "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis." These "*names*" here signify *individuals*, whom the Lord had counted up, and known each one of them by name. "These are they which have not defiled their garments ;" they had not gone on with the

world; now the professing church had defiled their garments. Sardis is not charged with the seductions of Balaam, or the corruptions of Jezebel, it may be, but she is "minding earthly things," and is "glorying in her shame." Sardis has not kept her garments unspotted by the world, and therefore *her spot is not* "the spot of his children." As Paul said, "even weeping, they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, who mind *earthly* things." It is the spirit of the world filling the heart as an accepted object, and hence conformity to it in order to walk with it, which is here spoken of. But those who have held by the cross of Christ with undefiled garments, "shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

The character of the blessing always answers to the difficulty; they had kept their garments unspotted by the world when down here, therefore they shall walk with Him in *white* up there, "and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Mark how individual this is—"his name," so constantly recurring. The force of the expression, "the book of life," is evidently that of a general registry of profession, taken from the custom of corporations of cities, where a name may be enrolled, the title to which may prove false, giving at the first blush a *prima facie* title to something, though on investigation it will have to be erased. Those who were written in this book had a profession, "a name to live." This was very different from "being written in the book of life before the foundation of the world;" because God, in that case, had written them there. It was thus the book of the counsels and purposes of God.

"I will confess *his name*;" the Lord will distinguish each one that is His. And in these individuals we see that the *invisible* church exists amid the wreck of all, and when the visible body is judged, they will escape, and not merely escape, for they will be taken to the Lord before this, so that when the Lord comes to judge

the world, they will come with Him : and the visible church, not answering to the grace, will be treated as the world. There is, therefore, an invisible church, I doubt not ; but mark, that when the true church is invisible, then the visible church is treated exactly like the world. These churches were called candlesticks, and God had put light in them, not to be put under a bushel, but to be put in a candlestick, to give light to all around. Well, then, is light invisible ? If it is, what is invisible light worth ? It only merits condemnation. What has been said by men for the last 300 years is quite true, that there IS an *invisible church*, but then this is the condemnation of that which is visible. Looked at with respect to its public collective testimony for God, does it bear out the precepts of Christ in its conduct and life ? No ; and therefore there has not been in the church the visible testimony to all the grace, and truth, and blessedness, which are the church's portion in Christ. We would here point out what very different aspects of the Lord's coming we have presented to us in these addresses. In Thyatira, in the Jezebel state of the church, He turns away the eye from all hope of its restoration as a whole, and turns it to the morning star for the comfort of those who, though not of the night, yet feeling that it is the night, are watching for the morning star ; to us presenting the *hope* of His coming as a *refuge* to the faithful overcomer in the midst of abounding evil. Here, in Sardis, His coming has the character of judgment—"I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come on thee." Sardis, being in a decayed, dead state, necessarily brings judgment on itself ; for if the professing church be got into a state like the dead, then it must be treated like the dead. But in Philadelphia it is quite a different thing ; there He addresses a poor, feeble remnant, in the midst of apostasy, with the blessed and encouraging hope of His coming quickly—"Behold I come quickly."

Philadelphia. We have seen the general course of the first of these churches to be declension; then the being drawn away by Satan; then warnings; here a remnant are comforted. What characterizes the faithful here is, that while they had no strength, they are yet in close connection with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What characterizes the father in Christ, in John's first epistle, is the knowledge of Him that is from the beginning. So here, in Philadelphia, we get little strength, it is true, but there is no denial of His name. The address to the church, the foundation of the declaration made to it, is connected with Christ, is Himself, it is not a question of *power*; but when all is going wrong, as in John's epistle, where there were the many antichrists, still there were those who had that by which they could detect the false one; for "he that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." Feeling it now to be a kind of hopeless thing to look for any restoration of the church, as far as regards apparent power, the keeping of the word of *Christ's patience* is what characterized the church of Philadelphia; and the name of "him that is holy and him that is true" is stamped upon it in a peculiar way. In the way Christ is presented here, there is no question of power, as in Sardis, but the unfailing certainty of what He was in His character, and what He has said—"He that is *holy*, and he that is *true*." With these two we can judge everything. When all was going wrong around, they were to keep to the simplicity that was in Christ; as in John's epistle—"This is the *true God* and eternal life." "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." They had got eternal life in their souls, and having touched Him and handled Him, and seen Him by faith, they could say who this *true* one was; and they could also say, "this is the Holy One," for He is not only the One who has power, but He is the Holy One. Remark, too, that the characters of Christ presented here form no part of the original glory of Christ, spoken of in the first chapter,

but refer to His moral character, discerned by the saint exercised in faith, at the epoch to which the church refers. But the saints here had "*kept the word of Christ's patience;*" and when the *word of God* is valued as such, then the *character of Christ Himself* governs the soul. *His precepts become our authority,* and *Christ Himself personally* rules the affections of the heart, and with a single eye the body is full of light. So it was with Mary, when the departure of the Lord drew nigh. The word of God links the soul with Christ as He was, and is ; it just gives one a *written Christ*. See in Matthew v.—"*Blessed are the poor in spirit ;*" and who so poor in spirit as Christ? "*Blessed are the pure in heart ;*" and who so pure as He? "*Blessed are the meek ;*" and who so meek as He? "*Blessed are the peace-makers ;*" He was the great peace-maker, the very Prince of peace. The first thing, of course, is to have Him as the living Christ for the salvation of the soul ; and then, through the written word, we get the spiritual perception of what this Christ is ; it is the simple expression of Christ Himself, of Him who was the express image of God ; "*was made flesh, and dwelt among us, so that we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ;*" and when we thus get the Spirit's testimony to Christ, the heart clings to Him as the "*holy*" and the "*true.*" Thus the Christ found in the word governs the affections, for we dare not, and would not, be without, or depart from, this written Christ. This living link to a living Christ is the only safeguard against them that would seduce you. A holy Christ in whom we have the truth is the blessed strong moral assurance of the soul, when a mixed and lifeless Christianity is powerless against delusion, and when the same causes make the professing church incapable of discerning a plain path, when there is not faith enough to do without the world, and mixture is everywhere. Then a holy and true Christ is the assuring guide and stay of the soul.

To Timothy Paul said, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus," and surely there can be no better knowledge to be got than the knowledge of Christ. This was the point in the Epistle of John. The father in Christ "knew him that is from the beginning;" he could tell what the true Christ was; he knew "him that was *holy*, him that was *true*." It is not *development* that is needed, but merely the getting back to the simplicity that is in Christ—to know Him truly that was at first revealed, Him that was from the beginning. Therefore, if my soul is attached to the Christ of the written word, the Christ that I have loved down here is the same Christ that I am waiting for to come and take me up there.

The blessed picture that we get here of the Lord Jesus is not like that given in the first chapter, with "his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace"—firm, unchanging, a consuming fire in judgment, and now so revealed, and according to what was revealed by the Holy Ghost; but the picture here given of Him is in connection with the moral character given of Him in the written word—"He that is holy and he that is true."

"He that hath the key of David: he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." Christ is not looking for strength in the saints: He enters into His own personal and peculiar service, and holds the "key" Himself; and this is our confidence. If raging billows rise in countries around us, and the preaching of the gospel seem to be forbidden, well, it is all in His hand. I might desire that the gospel might be preached in a certain land, and the hindrances may seem to be too many and too great; but my comfort is to know that Christ has the *key*, and all the divine power of God at His disposal; and as it is in John x., "To him the porter openeth," so that when Jesus presented Himself, as in the gospels, none

could shut out His testimony. All the powers of earth—the Pharisees, the lawyers, the chief priests, the governors, the Pilates, and the Herods (those foxes) could not hinder one poor sheep from hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd in the days of His flesh; and so it is now, for Christ is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” This is our confidence in preaching the gospel; for, with all the liberty with which we are blessed in this highly-favoured country, I could not count upon a single year more, but for this simple promise, “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it,” and I could go fearlessly into any country, whatever might be the outward circumstances, if I saw that the Lord had set before me an open door. Of course, we must wait the Lord’s time to have the door opened, as we see in the case of Paul, he was forbidden to speak in Asia at one time, and then we find him there for three years afterwards, the Lord owning his labours there, so that all Asia, of which Ephesus, where he was gathering a church, was the capital, heard the word of God. Of course, we shall have to be content to lean in faith on the arm of Him who holds the key, and *in our patience* we shall have to possess our souls; for there will always be circumstances to exercise our faith, and God will allow these circumstances to arise, to prove to us that we cannot do without Him, for then it is we find that we have no strength, and that God answers our weakness according to *His own strength*; because He cannot fail to answer the faith He has given. “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” This word has often given me great confidence—“no man can shut it.” This is such a blessed comfort, that if Christ has opened a door, *no* man, devil, or wicked spirit, can shut it; and although we have not strength even to push the door open, it is opened for us. The whole church is weak, as weak as can be, and that in a bad sense, for what faith have we? We hear of a little faith. God shews us His power, as we have heard of



in *Madagascar*. But where is the strength and energy of faith to be heard of amongst us?

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.” This stamps our safety and our power. It is Christ’s own patience, for He is also waiting for the kingdom, expecting, till His enemies be made His footstool. We wait as and with Him; but here it is by the word. It is that which is our warrant and our security—the word by which He guides us into the same mind and spirit in which He waits, separated from the world, and knit to Him in the same hopes, and joys, and delight, not finding rest till He finds His—the guidance of our mind, by the communicating His, into the thoughts and expectations which He has Himself; only let us keep fast hold of the word of Christ’s patience in these last perilous times. It is our power against the adversary; in the knowledge of Christ Himself, not in ecclesiastical power, but as holy and true, waiting apart from the world as He is, and keeping His word, and belonging to Him, so that He takes us out of the hour of temptation that hangs over the world, and the open door of service is ours meanwhile, in spite of all. For, thus associated with Him, we have His own portion. Not being in spirit dwellers upon earth, but waiting with Him, He does not make us pass through that hour of temptation which is to sift out those who have their home here, confounding by the power of the enemy and the tribulation of God the men of this world, and making the world cling to by any of His too great a torment to cling to any longer. All this the Philadelphian saint escapes; he can look straight up to the heaven and heavenly Christ he belongs to, and the heart associated with Him knows that Christ will not fail his heart, but as soon as He rises up to take His place and power towards the world, will take him to be with Him, according to the hope He has given him. Only let us keep simply to the written word of God, then we may defy all the power of our adversaries; not

that we would be adversaries to them, God forbid—only let there be in the heart the consciousness of Christ's approbation, and that closeness of heart to God which takes God's word for a guide because it is His, and then there will be the power of Christ, the strength of Christ made perfect in our weakness. That which characterizes the true saints at this present time is the written word of God, as bringing Christ's character and name as truth and holiness into the heart; and thus walking in fellowship and communion with "Him that is *holy* and Him that is *true*," they will be safe.

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie, behold I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Here we get those who have an opposite character; and the Lord speaks very plainly; He does not spare them a bit—they are the synagogue of Satan. What did these Jews pretend to? All that which externally gave them a religious title to govern, to command, in the truth; antiquity and ordinances established of God, as they really had been in the case of the Jews, and the proof that they were the true and only people of God, the priesthood instituted of God. They had the pretension to be God's competent administrators of His blessings, which none else were—they had zeal for God—possession of His oracles. All else but themselves were without these distinctive privileges. Where else was eternal life to be found? When Christ's authority is owned in the heart, then this word comes in, "We write unto you that believe, that ye may know that ye *have eternal life*, that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." If God *has given us* eternal life in Christ, we do not want those who pretend to be the exclusive administrators of it; and we cannot let anything come in and separate between us and Him; we cannot go away from Christ, and we have got the true Christ in the word; and we cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard.

He who would lead me elsewhere, I can easily detect as of the synagogue of Satan. They may prosper now—I will wait with Christ, keeping that word which teaches me from Him and with Him to wait till He comes and sets up the blessing and the glory.

But if God has given you eternal life, then do not you dispute with these of Satan's synagogue, as if they had any title from God; they have none, but judge ye whether ye are to obey them or God. We have "Him that is holy and him that is true"—"and the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." They were not to contend with this synagogue of Satan, and though they had but little strength, and were of no reputation, yet in patience they were to possess their souls, because Christ will yet manifest His love to them before their adversaries. The synagogue of Satan was a religion of the flesh, which rested in outward things—in all that nature could claim as religious—works, ordinances, and the like, assuming and occupying the place of the Jews in Paul's time; and it is spiritually the same now. But "I will make them know that *I* have loved *thee*;" the Greek marks with emphasis the "*I*" and "*thee*." Then the question resolves itself into this, Is Christ sufficient for me? is Christ's approbation sufficient motive to govern my conduct? If Christ's approbation be not sufficient to satisfy a soul, that soul can never walk aright.

"Behold, I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast," that is, "the word of my patience." I am waiting, and you must wait; Christ is expecting till His foes be made His footstool. Instead of taking our ease, we must be waiting till He come in, just as He always waited till His Father came in, as He does now till His Father makes His foes His footstool. I would mark here, how emphatically the word *my* comes in throughout this address. It is the practical identification of the saint with "*him that is holy and him that is true*"—waiting with *Him* in rejection from the hands of those who had all the ordinances, and antiquity for

them, we shall be sharers with Him in glory. The word *my* is especially connected with everything in the glory. You have been weak in testimony down here, but you have kept the word of my patience, and you shall be a "pillar" of strength in the temple of *my* God, I will write on you the name of *my* God, the name of the city of *my* God . . . which cometh down out of heaven from *my* God, and *my* new name. This identification with Christ in patience, and Him in everything, is of the deepest interest and instruction.

The Lord give us to walk in the power of the Spirit, with our hearts fixed on Christ, as revealed as the *holy* and the *true*, keeping the word of His patience, that so His approbation may be our everlasting reward. May He keep us separate from the world, upon which He is coming in judgment.

How great the contrast between expecting that which is hanging as a terror over a person's head, and knowing Christ in such a way, having Him so completely the whole object of our desires and affections, that when He says, "Surely I come quickly," the immediate response of our hearts may be, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

LECTURE VI.

WE only touched a little upon the general features of the church of Philadelphia last evening, just so much as was needful to connect it with the preceding church of Sardis. We will therefore now turn again, the Lord helping us, to consider more particularly the details of the church of Philadelphia; and, in so doing, we would notice, in the first place, that the most prominent feature in this church of Philadelphia is, that it is one of special blessing, to meet a special need. For after all the display of terrible evil through which we have had to pass, in the previous condition of the churches, now

that we have reached Philadelphia, we find that to be all mercy and blessing.

It is very blessed to observe, that however poor and feeble God's people may be, even though the faithful ones be reduced to a remnant of individuals, He never forgets them; His eye is ever upon them, to give them out of His own resources, according to *what* they need and *when* they need, at the time that surrounding things are darkest, when both the church and the world have arrived at a state of felt darkness, then the few who are faithful have the most "light in the Lord." For the life of faith is always nourished and sustained by the faithful grace of Christ, according to the power of that which draws upon it—according to the difficulties through which it has to pass.

It is another question whether the Lord's people are to be used in testimony by Him in time of failure, this will be according to His wisdom. We see this exemplified (as we have before remarked) in Israel; the failure of the golden calf was met by inward spiritual power in Moses putting the tabernacle outside the camp. And when the open and avowed worship of Baal prevailed, then God raised up Elijah and Elisha with great outward manifestation of power; but then the 7,000 faithful ones were hidden of God. The Lord may not choose to put the *outward* honour of testimony upon that which has failed. Still, He gives the needed grace and inward power of life to sustain the individual soul, and which, as regards the saints now, flowing from the Head in glory for the nourishment of the body on the earth, can *never fail*. But as regards gifts in the church, for instance, those which were for signs—"sign-gifts," as they are sometimes called, and a testimony to the world, signs being for those who believe not, as "tongues," "gifts of healing," &c., these may be all gone; but *never* can those gifts be removed which flow down from the Head to sustain the members of the body, for "no man ever yet hated his

own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the church is so specially brought out as the body of Christ, we find the gifts for the church spoken of as being "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Here we have not a word about the "sign-gifts," while in Corinthians we have "gifts of healing," "divers kinds of tongues," "interpretation of tongues," &c. Thus we see in scripture two characters of gifts distinctly marked out—first, the sign-gifts, as in Corinthians, which were public signs attached to the church for outward testimony, whereby to attract an unbelieving world. Secondly, those gifts which flow from the Head for the nourishment of the body. This nourishment must ever remain. It may come in the way of outward testimony, or direct from Christ Himself in the way of grace; but there must always be this supply from the Head. This is just what we get brought out in the Philadelphian church; for that which characterized it was weakness—an utter want of power, but a much greater nearness to Him who is power, a greater degree of affection to the Lord, more intimacy of communion with Him, and in the promises made to it a much more definite identification with Himself.

Weakness is that which characterized the church of Philadelphia, but then it was *without reproach* from the Lord. And we must ever remember this, that though God may give an outward display of power, such as gifts of healing, tongues, and the like, as a testimony to the world, or these may all have come to an end, yet at all times, either with or without this outward manifestation of power, the sense of weakness is competent strength if mixed with faith. There may be trouble of heart along with this sense of weakness without unbelief. There was this sense of the surrounding sorrow in the Lord Jesus. "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say, Father, save me from

this hour." But thus we see the sorrow was the very thing which immediately linked Him with His Father.

But, alas! in us there is too often such a getting into communion with the sorrow itself, such a turning of our souls to the thoughts of sorrow, as to lead to the distrusting God's competency to meet it; for, instead of saying, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul," we are turning about in the multitude of our thoughts to *think what is to be done*, and thus looking at and occupying ourselves about circumstances, or what we find within us, so as to keep God out altogether; but this was never the case with the Lord Jesus, for the moment the hour of sorrow appeared before His soul, the immediate cry was, "Father, save me from this hour;" but if we are thinking about our own weakness in any other way than to lead us to immediate dependence upon the strength of God, God with us and God for us, it is unbelief.

It is not, moreover, a sense of the greatness of God's gifts and revelations to us in which our strength lies, for signs and miracles do not give inward strength; they may confirm His word to us in times of trial, but can never impart *inward strength*; and it is of importance clearly to understand this. Take, for instance, the case of Paul, who was caught up into the third heaven, and there heard things which it was not possible for him to utter. An amazing thing this, and, doubtless, it was a kind of background for Paul's soul to rest upon in his trials, his having been in the third heaven; but it did not give him inward strength—on the contrary, the flesh, without God's overruling care, would have been puffed up, and that is not strength; but when he got something that made him sensible of his own weakness, then strength from God could come in. And so it is with us, our hearts are so treacherous, and our flesh so wicked, that, if not watched against, we should abuse everything that the Lord makes known

to us. We need not stop here to inquire what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was, although it is often made the subject of much fruitless inquiry, out of mere curiosity; but this we would remark, that each one of us will have a different thorn according to the danger we are in. Thus much we know from Galatians iv. 13, 14, that it was something which tended to make him despicable in the flesh, thus producing sensible weakness in his ministry. And therefore Paul cried *thrice* to the Lord to remove it; to which the Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul must realize this sense of weakness in order to learn where real strength lies; and then he can glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him, as he says, "When I am weak then am I strong." There is always strength in looking to God, but if the mind rest upon the weakness otherwise than to cast it upon God, it becomes *unbelief*. Difficulties may come in. God may allow many things to arise to prove our weakness, but the simple path of faith is to go on, not looking beforehand at what we have to do, but reckoning upon the help that we shall need, and find, when the time arrives. The sense that we are nothing makes us glad to forget ourselves, and then it is that Christ becomes everything to the soul. There is real strength in pursuing the simple path of obedience in what we may have to do, whatever the trial may be. So it was with David when he had to fight. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the bear, and out of the paw of the lion, will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine;" it was no matter to David whether it was the lion, the bear, or this giant of the Philistines, it was all the same to him, for *in himself* he was as weak in the presence of one as the other; but he went on quietly doing his duty, taking it for granted that God would be with him—*this is faith*. Mark the contrast with this in the unbelief of the spies sent by Moses to spy out the land; they trembled, and said they were but as grasshoppers

in the sight of their enemies, thus quite forgetting what God was for them, and thus making it a question between *themselves* and the *Anakims*, instead of between the *Anakims* and God. But where there is a simple reference to the Lord, then "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me." When trouble comes in, we must not be looking *at* ourselves, but, knowing that we are nothing but weakness, simply look to the Lord as everything in the way of strength for us.

The case of Philadelphia was one of decided *weakness*, but *faithfulness*: there may be great apparent power, and yet weakness itself; as the Holy Ghost says in Corinthians, there may be the speaking with the tongues of men and angels, the understanding of all mysteries, and all knowledge, and yet there may be, at the same time, the most perfect weakness, because all this was not done in communion with God. There is nothing more dangerous than to have the outward manifestation of power going beyond the inward association and communion of soul with God; the life within must be equal to the outward display of power. We have lately alluded to this in the case of Elijah.

"These things saith he that is *holy* and he that is *true*." Here, in Philadelphia, we have the Lord in His moral character, and not in the character of personal power as the Son of God, but as the "Holy and the true," presenting Himself as a standard of judgment as to everything inconsistent with Himself, and suiting Himself in *grace* to the condition and need of His faithful ones, and by His truth giving a means of judgment, and security of heart and confidence to the saints. And we also find Him disposing of means in favour of the church in such a way, that, if He opens a door, none can shut it, or if He shuts a door, none can open it. Thus there are the two things, He is the *holy* and the *true* to those who trust in Him, and He has also, not here, indeed, the display of power, but the key of power, as Jehovah said of Eliakim to Shebna, in Isaiah

xxii. 22: "The key of the house of David I will lay upon his shoulder, so he shall open, and none shall shut, and he shall shut, and none shall open." So that where there is this weakness, He encourages the church to look to Himself as the holy and the true, and trust Him; and where there is this resting on His title to *open* and *shut*, and this trust in His person, and conformity to His character, the church is perfectly secure, no matter what may happen: let all the power of man or Satan do their worst, if I am resting in Christ, who is perfectly true, and He has opened a door, neither man nor devil can shut it.

How analogous is this position of the Philadelphian church to that of Christ when He was on the earth. Everybody sought to shut the door against Him; Pilate, Herod, Scribes, Pharisees, and the whole nation of the Jews, were all trying to shut the door against Christ: Christ, like the Philadelphian church, was in the midst of an order of things which God had once instituted, but which had entirely failed; for in Christ's time there was no ark, no Urim and Thummim, no Shechinah (the glory of God's presence in the temple), all that had really constituted the sensible display of power and testimony, was gone, and instead of Jehovah having a throne in Jerusalem, they themselves had fallen under Gentile power, and were slaves to man's throne. And hence arose the exceeding subtlety of the question the Jews put to our Lord—"What thinkest thou, is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not?" If the Lord had answered, "No," it would have been the denial of God's chastisement for their sins; and if He had said, "Yes," then it went to the denial of His title as Messiah. But the Lord perceiving their wickedness, His reply to them amounted to this, "You have brought yourselves under this dominion because of your sins, and therefore now you must submit to *its* authority." Not only "the powers that be are ordained of God," and as such we submit to them; but in Israel's case it would have been denying God's chastisement upon them for their

sins, as it is said, "we are slaves this day because of our sins." So the Lord Himself submitted to paying the temple tribute. But though Israel as a body failed in their faithfulness to God, yet God could not fail in His faithfulness to them, for His Spirit remained among them, as we learn in Haggai; and therefore we find there was a little remnant in the Annas and Simeons, who were waiting for redemption in Israel. As it is said in Malachi, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another"—thus we see it was a condition of thorough darkness, and when He who was the Light comes in, He is at once rejected. Well, what then? Was the door shut to Him? No: "to Him the porter openeth." Christ came in at the door, not like all the pretenders that came before Him, climbing up some other way, but, while working in divine power, Christ came in by God's own appointed way, and no man could shut it. He is become God's appointed way to us; He said of Himself, "I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved."

Whatever links our position with Christ, as an example and pattern, is in truth a blessing to us; for was there ever one that went through all with such unflinching, lowly, faithfulness to God as He did? See the contrast of His lowly path with that of Elijah's, and what do we see? Elijah was going on ministering with great outward power, bringing down fire from heaven to destroy the prophets of Baal, and thinking himself to be the only one that was left that was true to God; whereas God had 7,000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal, whom Elijah had not found out, while Christ was content to be nothing in a world where man was everything, and God was shut out. He was content to be treated as the very offscouring of the earth; and yet at the same time there was not one single lost sheep of the house of Israel that His voice did not reach as the voice of the Good Shepherd (let them be the vilest of sinners, a woman of Samaria, an adulteress, or a publican), that His eye did not discover. Thus,

in virtue of His very humiliation, He puts those who now have but this "*little strength*" into the very same place which He Himself took, and then, as the porter did for Him, He opens the door for them, *which none can shut*. We are waiting for the glory, "the glory thou hast given me I have given them;" and while thus waiting we have to pass through that which has "*Ichabod*" written on it, the glory hath departed. The testimony of this dispensation in its public power is gone, never to be recovered. What the Lord is pressing upon them is, that they are not to suppose that the evil, such as that of Thyatira and Sardis, can be put in order; but He says, "Behold, I come quickly, hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown;" that is, keep the word of my patience till I come. Thus we find ourselves in circumstances analogous to Christ; for when the Lord says, "Behold I come quickly," it is to the end that we may get into greater likeness to Christ's position, and although trying and humbling, yet one of blessing, finding ourselves just in the same position which Jesus took; with the same promise—an open door which none can shut. That is present faith; it is not much strength that we want, but the thing we most want is greater conformity to the *position* of Christ.

Observe another thing peculiar to this church of Philadelphia; the Lord does not set about canvassing their works, but leaves the heart of these poor weak ones satisfied with the consciousness that *He knows them*. To the other churches it was not so; He notices the *character* of their works; to Sardis He said, "I have not found thy works perfect before God," but it is sufficient for us that He knows our works. Oh what a comfort it is, for if we had to look for perfection as in Sardis, we should find it very troublesome to give in the account; the mixture of things, the little faith, would dismay us; in fact, none of our works have answered to the *grace received*; there is plenty of activity, there is much that man may approve, but, taking

the general character of service, how difficult to find that which *God* can approve. Then, again, if we get occupied with the state of things in the world around us, and in the church of God itself, our hearts would sink within us, did we not fall back on this most blessed truth, that *Christ knows* all about it.

But then does He say that they have nothing? No; He says, "Thou hast kept *my word*;" that which characterized Christ must be the characteristic of the church of God. Christ could say, "Thy word have I hid in my heart;" and this is especially the characteristic of faithfulness in the last days. Paul, in writing to Timothy, says, "In the last days perilous times shall come," and there would be a terrible form of godliness without power; and even then the mystery of iniquity had come in, "and evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse," and the safeguard is, "but continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures," the plain written word, what we call the Bible, read from his youth. Security would not be in the manifestation of outward power, nor yet in miracles, but simply the written word. This was the instrument of blessing; this the recognized authority with Timothy; of course, the grace of God was needed for his conversion. I refer to this now, as this keeping close to the word is the special security of these latter days, namely, the special authority of the word of God itself, just what Timothy, as a child, found in the scriptures; and, added to this, of course with Timothy, was that which he had learned from the apostles, equally inspired, and which was thus a known, immediately-divine, authority in a person "of whom," says the apostle, "you have learned it," and which since has become the *written word* to us. The written word of God is where all our security lies through grace. The Lord does not say "You have strength," but "You have kept *MY WORD*;" and then, further, He does not

say, "You have known me in this or that character," but "You have *not denied my name*." The Lord's name means always the revelation of what He is, as if He be called Christ He is the anointed one. The Lord is here saying, that as you have stuck fast to me as revealed, now I will make them which have a false name and pretences "to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Here we get the two characters contrasted; and also mark the emphasis on the word "my;" it is Christ's word upon which I am called to rest. "*My word*," the word of Christ Himself—to come in personal communion with Christ Himself—not even the church's word. Suppose, for instance, I take the church's word, that is assuming that the church has authority, but if I take Christ's word, then I have the authority of Christ Himself; and it is by the word of Christ that I must judge everything about the church itself. And the word of Christ connects us with Christ, His name and person; and these are the two things which are so especially essential for us to have, to enable us to walk contrary to the seductions which we know are peculiar to the last days. It is seductive power which characterizes these times, "evil men and *seducers* shall wax worse and worse. These things have I written unto you, concerning them that *seduce* you."

In speaking in a general way of the character of the times, we look for seductive power. There will be a distinct and definite Antichrist, who will shew it in another way, but "even now there are many antichrists;" therefore we have "earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." If he whose coming is after the power of Satan, with signs and lying wonders, shall prevail against those who "receive not the *love of the truth* that they might be saved," we have need to hold fast that which will guard us against him who will come in as an angel of light; but it is those who have not received the love of the truth who fall into his snares. And this safeguard we have in

the word of Christ Himself, keeping the word of His patience, and not denying His name. It must be an individual thing, for seductive power having come in, marks the times in which we live to be "*perilous times*," not by open persecution and the like, but as the serpent beguiled Eve by his *subtlety*, so our minds are in danger of being corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ. And what have we to deliver us from this? Is it the outward manifestation of power, miracles, &c.? No; we have no outward power wherewith to meet Satan, we are *weakness itself*: thou hast a little strength, but our safeguard is in this—each soul individually for itself holding fast the written word of Christ, and not denying His name. It seems not *much* to say of them, "Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name," for there was not much done by them. But, dear friends, when the seductive power of evil was there, it was saying *everything* of them; when all that was going on was to the setting aside of the written word they *kept it*: and when everything went to the denial of Christ's name they did *not* deny His name. That which is a great thing in God's sight, is not the calling down fire from heaven, as Elijah did, but the being faithful amidst surrounding unfaithfulness. So likewise it did not seem to be saying much for the 7,000 that did not conform to the gross act of worshipping Baal, in merely saying they had "*not bowed the knee to Baal*," but it was, in truth, saying everything for them, because they were surrounded by all those *who did bow the knee to Baal*. So likewise the church of God was at first set up in power, but *tares* were plentifully sown among the wheat, and that which marks out the faithful ones is simply this, that when the seductive power of evil comes in, they are not seduced and led away by it; it is not in the manifestation of outward power, but simply faithfulness in walking with God in the midst of evil. Thus in the church of Philadelphia there was faithfulness of walk, which gave them inward power, although no outward display of power.

"Behold I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie." Here we find this individual faithfulness in a secret walk with God, contrasted with those who cling to something *established*, where there was abundance of form, a fair show in the flesh, boasting themselves to the Jews, and attempting to set up again that which used to be the outward characteristic of the people of God, not seeing that "*new*" thing which God had now set up, and which now puts the heart to the test. They do not reject the word of God (the Jews did not either), but it is not *God's word* that governs them. The Jews received the scriptures, but they rejected Christ, and killed Him; as Jesus Himself said, "They will put you out of the synagogue;" nor was it without the notion that they were serving God in doing so. "The time cometh that he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service." But this was pure rejection of the light God sent. "And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor me." Any old truth which has gained credit in the world, so as to be accounted orthodox, fails to put the heart to the test. It accredits nature, one is esteemed for it. If I can take religion, and accredit myself with it, instead of having the heart put to the test by it in the exercise of faith, I may be quite sure that it is not the religion of God; though it may be the truth as far as it goes, it is not faith in God. That is what this synagogue of the Jews were doing, they were setting aside Christ's name, and Christ's word, for that which could be rested upon where there was *no heart for Christ*; tradition, ordinances, ancestry, &c., were the things they loved, and not the word of Christ for themselves. It is quite true that the Jews had been God's people, but they had rejected and trampled under feet the name of Christ; and that is what makes all the difference, for now that Christ has been manifested, what God is looking for is faithful obedience to His Son. Faithful adherence to Christ now is everything.

“I will make them to come and worship before Thy feet, and to know that *I have loved thee.*” God did not own these pretenders to religious antiquity as His people, all they would get was just to know that Christ had loved this poor despised remnant. “To know that I have loved thee:” see now what the heart has to be satisfied with, not the present acknowledgment from those who profess to know God, while in works they deny Him, but the calm settled confidence that Christ loves it. This is that which puts the heart to the test: if you want present enjoyment, bright pictures set before the mind, taste gratified, imagination fed, men gained, something of “reverend antiquity,” Christ is not in any of these things, “He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;” and He Himself is the *Truth*, “Holy and true.” And if we have the love of Jesus as a present thing in our souls, we have all we want in Him. There are plenty of people asking, What is truth? With such these pretensions may have weight. The synagogue of Satan may be religion, and ancient, reverend, full of gorgeous attractions, and what has authority over the flesh, and accepted for us by those who, like Pilate, who asked what is truth, and then crucified Jesus, who is the Truth, to please the priests of the day. The character of these last days is just (this, that men are always seeking, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth.)

I have no need to be asking, what is truth, if I have it; what a man seeks he has not got. A man that is always hunting after truth acknowledges by his actions that he has not got it. Christ said, *I am the truth*, He is the centre of all truth, and is the ground of everything that connects us with God. An infidel will raise doubts about everything, but establishes nothing; but we want something that is *certain*; the moment we have the person of Christ we have the *Truth*: “no man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Do I want to know what God is? what man

is ? I get in Christ a perfect picture of what God is to man, and what He is as a man to God. It is all in Christ ; of course we have to advance in the knowledge of it. The heart that has Christ wants not the synagogue of Satan ; the heart that has received His testimony has set to his seal that God is true ; the soul knowing this is in the simplest way kept from evil. I have got *grace* too as well as *truth*—"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." When I was living in a lie, it was grace that brought the truth to my mind ; and what can a soul want more ? It has sorrow indeed, by reason of the defiled place through which it is now passing, but there is no more uncertainty about its portion, it has got all in Christ, there is nothing wanted to add to the secret blessing. "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet," that is in the sense of doing homage, "and to know that I have loved thee." We know it *now*, not as deserving it indeed, for it is all of grace ; but we have the present enjoyment of it through Christ's presence. We know that love of Christ which passes knowledge, indeed, and the Father's too, as He says, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and *I in them*." The world does not know it now, but in that day the world shall know that the Father hath loved us as He loved His Son. When the heart gets hold of this love of Christ to it, *it rests there* ; it is *satisfied* with the present enjoyment of Christ's love, although those around know nothing of the approbation it conveys to the heart. The Lord is, now in various ways weaning our hearts from everything around us, in order that we may find in the testimony of His personal love to us, that which strengthens our faith, settles the conscience, and guides the heart. Christ says, "I am the door," and that is the warrant for the sheep following Him out. In the time of Christ there was the Jewish order of things which God had set up ; and there was no warrant for getting out of this Jewish system until Christ went

out; but the heart drawn to, and attached to Christ, had the special warrant of going after Him outside the established system; "following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

In this church of Philadelphia we have the promise which met the hope that the faithful had of being with Christ in glory. Identification with Him in His position connects them with Himself, and with the word of His patience. They had not all the professing church of one mind with them; and they were not yet enjoying the full result of His love, not having Christ personally and fully present with them, I mean; and if Christ's love is to be the guide of my conduct, what the heart wants is, that Christ should be with it, for if we love a person, we surely want to be with him. But having Christ in our hearts, we are keeping the word of His patience; such is a trying, sifting, purging, exercising time, no doubt, but we must wait. And mark further, how this blessed identification and connection with Himself is kept up all through, as it is not simply the word of patience, but "*my* patience." And why "*my* patience?" Because Christ is still waiting (see Ps. cx.), and it is this which determines all our conduct, for if Christ is waiting, we must wait also. Christ has to wait in a state of expectancy, so to speak, in the exercise of patience, for the Father's time, and it is in this sense, I doubt not, that He is said not to know the time which the Father hath put in His own power. Christ has done all that was needed for His friends to present them to God, and hath sat down at the right hand of God, "expecting till his foes be made his footstool"—Christ is waiting until He gathers in all His friends, before He does as He says His "strange work" on the earth, in dealing with His foes. And hence this word of "*my* patience" is just what is needed, for we are waiting for that day of which Christ tells us (John xiv.), "I will come again and receive you unto myself."

We see all creation groaning around us waiting for

that day, and we too groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of the body, but all is in disorder till then. Where are the Jews, "still beloved for the fathers' sake?" They are as vagabonds and wanderers upon the face of the whole earth, without priest, without teraphim, without anything, as a teal tree and an oak when it has cast its leaves, though the Lord is working among them. If I look at the world all is sin and misery; if I look at every created thing it is groaning. Look at what calls itself the church; the universal cry is, "Who will shew us any good"—who is satisfied with anything? I do not speak thus in the bad sense of dissatisfaction; but there is nothing on which the soul can rest. It is no matter, take whatever system you will, the general feeling is, that all the foundations of the world are out of course. The raven, indeed, may go and light upon some dead floating carcass, but *the dove* can find no rest for the sole of her foot, save in *the Ark*. And what have we, in the midst of the dense darkness of the night, on which to rest our weary souls? Nothing but the certain expectation of the coming of the *bright and morning star*.

How long will Christ be waiting till He can deal in judgment, and when can He do this? When He has got His friends with Him, then He begins to act in the character of Judge; not, indeed, that He will at once cut them all off, but then it is that He will take to Himself His *great power*. What He is specially waiting for is, that those who have His portion should be *with Himself* and *as Himself*. We are predestinated to be conformed to His image. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied," when He gets His bride with Himself and as Himself. If the mighty man, the mystic man, the man child of Revelation xii., is to act, He must first be *complete* (of course He is so essentially in Himself), but as head over all things to the church, *which is His body*. The head and the body must be united before He can act as having this title before the world, because the mystic man, as a

whole, cannot take it until the church is taken up to Him, for not until then—until the church, the *body*, is united to the *head*, Christ, in heaven, is the mystic man in that sense complete; and therefore the church must be taken up before Christ can come in judgment.

What is the great hindrance to the full blessing of the church now? All from the beginning have failed: Adam—man before the flood—Noah—man under law; then take Christianity—how have the tares been sown among the wheat? Priesthood, through the influence of Satan, taking the place of Christ, and our union with Him. After this—summed up in the final apostasy—the acting of judicial power to set aside the evil begins. The first act of power, when the mystic man is complete, will be to cast Satan and his angels down (Rev. xii. 9), to cast them out of heaven, and they are never seen there any more at all, but they are cast down into the earth, and then the devil has great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time; and in his great rage he stirs up all things in his full character of adversary against the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the Lord will come to execute judgment, with His saints, upon the earth. He must set things to rights by removing the evil. And as soon as His enemies are made His footstool, then He brings in the fulness of blessing. But we must keep in mind that the judgment is consequent upon the association of the church with Christ. The mystic man must be complete, in that sense of it, before He can execute judgment.

Then Christ takes an entirely different character; until He takes us up into the glory He is presented as a *Saviour* (and even then there will be, doubtless—after the church's removal—a saved remnant), but then the acceptable time is ended; and then in "righteousness he doth judge and make war." And when He comes forth thus, we shall fully understand why it is the word of His patience now; for till then, till He

take unto Him His great power, and reign, we are linked with Him in heart and mind in the word of His patience; and the blessing of this to us is our association with Christ Himself, the perfect linking up with Christ in all things. As a man, not at all touching the divine glory of His person, but as taking the official character of a servant, Christ has to wait until God, in His good pleasure, puts all things under His feet; and this, I doubt not, as I have said, is the meaning of the words—"of that day knoweth *no man*, neither the Son, but the Father." But thus linked up with Christ, and having His present love as the satisfying portion of the soul, we had rather wait and have it with Him, than have it before Him. Thorough association with Christ Himself is the proper character of the church of God, for it is not merely that it is blest, but that it is associated with Him who blesses. We are His bride, this is our proper place; and whenever we descend from this, we get away from the full power of God's thoughts of love about us, and about what He has made Christ to be to us.

Whatever is said of Christ in the day of glory, we find the church is associated with Him in it all:—in His Melchisedec character, for instance, the highest place in authority as King, and the nearest in worship, as Priest:—we also are made kings and priests. Eve was associated with Adam in the dominion, but there was nothing in the whole *creation* which could have had this place, as it is written, "for Adam there was not a help-meet found for him;" but when Eve, as the bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, was brought to him, he could say—"This is now [*now, this time*, for that is the force of the original] bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." There was a help-meet found for him. This is equally true of the Lord and the church, for He can say—"Now this is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," and can rejoice and delight in the production of His own love.

The Lord forbid that we should sink down from this.

our true place ; and may He give unto us a deep and abiding sense of our being thus linked up in full blessed association with Himself, for the heart of Christ could not be satisfied without it, and neither should ours. It is not a question of our worthiness, for in ourselves, as in flesh, we are vile sinners, but of Christ's affection. True humbleness is not to think evil of ourselves, but not to think about ourselves at all. But, mark, it is a much harder thing to forget self, than even to have evil thoughts about self. If we are not humble, we must be humbled.

"Because thou hast kept the word of *my* patience, I also will keep thee," &c. The Lord says, if I own you as keeping "the word of *my* patience," and not as having any strength, but as in connection with myself, then "I will keep thee," &c. ; thus He connects us with Himself, a poor feeble folk though we be, like the conies who were but a feeble folk, yet made their nest in the rock. "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Now, as regards the consequences, what a comfort is here. It was not a question of strength at all, but of being kept from a terrible time that was coming, "to try them that dwell upon the earth." These last words describe the moral condition of a *class*. Do you suppose that God takes pleasure in afflicting His people ? No, in truth He does not want to put you into temptation, but if you have got into a position in which you are mixed up with these dwellers upon the earth, upon whom the hour of temptation is coming, you must be dealt with to be delivered from that on which that dreadful hour is coming. The gospel is preached now, and is taking out souls from the world, and the whole thoughts, feelings, desires, and affections of the saints should be looking out for the day of glory. And if they have got into Christ's place of patience, they do not want sifting as the world does ; but if they are mixed up with the world, they must be sharers in the troubles of the hour of tempta-

tion which is coming to try those who dwell upon the earth, or practically sifted before to be rescued from it. A time is coming when the beast will blaspheme those that dwell in heaven, but he cannot touch them.

When we know our heavenly character, it makes us *strangers* and *pilgrims* upon the earth, instead of dwelling here, and seeking our portion here; but those who are *dwellers* here must come into this hour of temptation which is coming to try those who dwell on the earth. And mark here that this is a distinct thing from the tribulation spoken of in Matthew xxiv., that time of trouble is confined to Jerusalem; as it is said in Jeremiah, "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it;" but here, this is "a time of trouble which shall come upon *all the world*, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Those who have kept the word of Christ's patience now, *He* will keep from that time. If the Lord is now getting fruit from them in a way which this temptation is intended to produce, then there will be no need for them to be tried by it.

But now, see how He encourages them: "Behold I come quickly," as if He should say, "You must go on" bearing my lot in patience, and in the cross too, if you will share my lot in glory; but "I come quickly." It is not His coming, as presented to Sardis, as a thief in the night; but what Christ would press upon the church now is, that His return is a speedy thing; He does not tell them the moment, but puts His coming before them as their comfort, joy, and hope, and thus fixes the heart upon Himself; as it is not so much that He is coming quickly, but that it is *Himself* that is coming, "I, Jesus," &c., &c. Oh! if the heart has tasted God's love, what comfort it is, after all, to rest in Himself; as at the close of this book! After Christ has led the mind of the church through those things which He is going to do on earth, then He brings back the heart of the church to Himself—"I, Jesus."

That which characterizes the church of Philadelphia,

in its immediate connection with Himself; it is Christ Himself who is coming. It is neither knowledge nor prophecy that can satisfy the heart; but the thought that Jesus is coming to take me to Himself, is the blessed hope of one who is attached to Him by grace. Prophecy concerns Christ's coming to the earth, but my going to Christ is the proper and blessed hope of one united to Christ by faith. I solemnly respect and reverence God's warning about coming judgment, &c., but it is not a matter of affection. God's purposes about Jerusalem, Babylon, &c., of which prophecy speaks, are most important and instructive to the mind; but the affections are not drawn out by knowing about the doom of Babylon, Antichrist, &c. I love Christ, therefore I long to see Him, but prophecies of coming judgment do not connect the spirit and heart with the person of the Lord Jesus.

Then we have this warning: "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take *thy crown*." Oh! may the Lord give us to keep His word, and to be looking for Him as a present thing. If the devil could take away the hope of the Lord's coming as a present thing, that would be taking away our hope and crown. No man or devil can take away anything from us, if we have but that clear sense of faith which connects us with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a present thing. To lose this is to lose spiritual power, and anything that robs us of spiritual power in our association with Christ, is to rob us of present blessing, and of that which is the path towards our crown. And, beloved brethren, we are now going through every kind of thing that is likely to rob us of our crown, everything which puts faith in a coming Jesus to the test, and calls it in question. In the case of the ten virgins, they all slumbered and slept; the wise were as fast asleep as the foolish; and at midnight, when the cry was made, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" they *all* rose and trimmed their lamps. There was no difference in this respect; but the one had the oil of the

Spirit, the other not ; and between the cry going forth, and the actual coming of the Bridegroom, there was plenty of time for the lamps to be going out if not supplied with oil, and hence the manifest difference between the virgins was in the supply of oil which they had. If the first thought in the hearts of the foolish virgins had been the Bridegroom Himself, they would have been thinking of the light that He would want when He came ; but they were occupied with other things, satisfied with merely keeping company with the virgins ; the dress, and the lamps *without oil*, would suffice to place them among the company ; but, alas ! without the oil they could not keep their lamps *burning* for their Lord till He came. Still, there were those who were fitted to receive Him—"and when the Bridegroom came, they that were *ready* went in with Him to the wedding, and the door was shut." And so it is with us. The cry has gone forth, and between this and His actual coming, the Lord is testing us, whether our hearts are set upon Him or not.

We have now only time left to consider the promise "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God," &c. Here we see how definitely all the promises are connected with the time of glory—the "New Jerusalem"—here the heart is lifted up into its own proper dwelling-place. Are we taking the position of heavenly dwellers while walking this earth ? Remark in how thorough a manner the saints are connected with the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling-place of him that overcometh. He shall be in God's temple, in contrast with the synagogue of Satan, in the full enjoyment of the things of God, every purpose of His love fully brought out—"Him will I make a *pillar* ;" he who was but faithful, a weak one in the earth, when the professing church was great, but not fulfilling the purpose of God as the "*pillar and ground of the truth*," shall then be the very pillar of strength, and that the very strength of God, because there has been firmness against the power of seduction.

It is always "*my God*:" throughout Christ keeps up this connection with Himself. He was once in appearance the weak one on the earth. He says, "I have been rejected, and you have taken the place of rejection with me, and I know who have been faithful to me, I go to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." He is the patient One who waits the Father's time for the glory which is due to Him—we have part in His patience.

I will write upon him the name of *my God*, the way in which Christ as a man knows God; "You shall have that name publicly set upon you, as you have not denied my name down here—the city of *my God*," waited for in faith, this is your place." Abraham looked for a city, whose builder and maker was God. It was a heavenly city they wanted for themselves on the earth, even when the flesh had built one here. This heavenly citizenship shall then be stamped upon the faithful, in the city of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the stranger on the earth. If men are looking for an ecclesiastical stability, a present establishment of things, they can have it now, but then it is not according to God's word; if content to walk simply with Christ now, waiting until God owns a city as *His* (the city of *my God*), they shall have it then; it comes down out of heaven from God. When Charles II. was away from this country, those who were attached to his person felt themselves strangers in the land while their master was absent. And so it is with the Christian now; he belongs to Christ; he is a child of the day, waiting for Christ and the day of His appearing.

"*My new name*," not the old name of Messiah, but His wondrous new name, taken as the result of a heavenly redemption. We shall have what is stable then, though we have it not now in one sense.

May the Lord give us to know what it is to be really associated with Christ Himself, and to know this blessed thought of God about us, "that in the ages to come he

might shew the exceeding riches of his grace," &c. He has associated us with the object of all His infinite delight—His eternal delight—for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, and therefore have the privilege and portion of Jesus Himself. May God keep our hearts untainted by this present evil world, and in freshness of affection to Himself; this can only be by keeping in communion with Christ Himself. To know our portion in Him, to know the value of His name, gives courage and strength to keep His word, and not deny His name.

LECTURE VII.

I HAD thought and hoped to have closed our consideration of this portion of scripture last evening; but I am not sorry now that time then forbade it, as I feel very strongly, the importance of this last address to Laodicea, and it will give me the opportunity of taking up more generally what we have been going through in connection with the testimony of the word of God to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see in this address to the church of Laodicea, that it is threatened with final and complete judgment, without any possibility of escape whatever. It is not indeed that it has yet arrived at the full consummation of evil, for if it had, where would be the use of warning it? This church of Laodicea, as all the other six churches were, is addressed as having the character of the church of God; that is, as holding before God the position of acknowledged testimony of Him for the world, and as such it is threatened with rejection. This is important in connection with other parts of scripture. It is not the history of that which has been accomplished, but the warning and threat of that which is coming; hence its character is prophetic. And as the whole book of Revelation is judgment, so likewise, in these addresses to the churches, we get the judgment of the professing

church, standing under God's eye, as holding this position. And I would here recall to your memory what I have said before, and what it is important to remember, that what is before us in all these churches is not the work of God's grace in itself; for these addresses to the churches would have no place if it were—nor yet Christ the Head of the body, as the source of grace to its members—nor yet is it the work of the Spirit of God, as that of course is never the subject of judgment; as also the grace which flows down from the Head to the members can never fail. This can never be the subject either of warnings or threatenings. It is the condition and state of the church which is here shewn forth, as holding the place of responsibility under the eye of God, and the consequent dealings of Christ with it, in the expectation of fruit.

Further these addresses are not to individuals but to churches, still there is a great deal to be gathered from these addresses by individuals who have an ear through the instruction of the Holy Ghost (I trust that we even now have gathered a little of such instruction). The promises also are to individuals, "to him that overcometh," in the midst of evil circumstances, but the dealing is with the body.

It is not, then, the supply of the Spirit of grace from the Head, nor yet the directions through the Spirit of the Father's love dealing with the children within, because that supposes the church to be in an accepted and healthy state, and gives them directions suited to that state, and answering to the purpose for which it was called into church position. In Laodicea there is that which cannot apply to individuals; you may give warning to individuals in the church of God, "while the simple pass on and are punished;" but this is not mere warning, *excision* is announced, and that can never apply to a saint of God. "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." It is the excision of the external professing body, which bears the name of the church, as

such. This leads us to see the important truth of the responsibility of the professing church of God on the earth ; therefore it is I am so glad of this opportunity of going over again the general principles connected with this.

“Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things saith the *Amen*, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” The character of Christ given here is remarkable. In the last three churches we have seen that Christ leaves, so to speak, the characteristics given of Him in the *first* chapter, that is, He is not presented in any part of the character that He takes in the first chapter ; but we find a new special revelation of Himself according to the circumstances of the church addressed. It is not the same traits of character given of Him as those John had seen in the vision ; it does not connect itself thus with the things “*seen*,” but with the “*things that are*,” in a new and distinct condition from that in which they had stood in their original relationship with Christ ; and therefore a fresh revelation of Christ is made for the need and occasion of the church.

In Philadelphia Christ was not known in the same character in which He was known in Thyatira, as “Son over his own house,” but fresh traits of His character were to be seized by the church for its peculiar need. From the same period of time, and even before, that is, from the time of the complete corruption of its original standing, the coming of the Lord is held out to the church. The saint could no longer occupy himself with the hope of the restoration of the church as a professing whole, and therefore the coming of the Lord is placed before it as its only resource, that the faithful remnant might look out for Him, finding in Christ that which they could lean upon and trust in, when the outward ground was slipping from under their feet. Those who had special faith in Jesus could not float on with the common stream of the thoughts of the church ; for if they did, they would find themselves with Jeze-

bel, or with Sardis, having a name to live, and yet dead. Faith has need to be sustained in a peculiar manner, in order to keep me from the seductions of the "synagogue of Satan." Common grace will do when the church itself is in its place, but *uncommon* grace is needed to sustain the faithful when the church is not keeping its place. If Jezebel be there, I cannot go on with common faith; Christ and falsehood cannot go on together. If it be a name to live, being dead, I must have something special to *sustain* the life in me; therefore, whether it be Jezebel seducing,* or Babylon corrupting, or Laodicea going to be spued out, I could not go on content with the moral state of things, therefore I should need special grace suited to it, discerned by spiritual-mindedness alone, not being the natural relationship between Christ and the church as such. Of course, we at all times need the sustaining grace of God, we cannot get on without it, as every one knows; I need it—you need it—we all need it—but when that which bears the name of the church of God is nigh unto cursing, is going to be spued out, then a double measure and peculiar character of grace is needed to sustain the faithful ones in the narrow and often lonely path in which they will be called to walk. And mark here, when they had got into the Philadelphian state of things, with its little strength, and keeping Christ's word, and not denying His name, the coming of the Lord is brought in for the comfort of the faithful ones; and then the subject is dropped.

Now here, though the professing church still subsists in form, yet it is utterly rejected, and it is unconditionally declared that Christ will spue it out of His mouth. The judgment is not accomplished, but it is certain, and assumed as such. And the reason why the coming of the Lord is dropped after Philadelphia is, that the whole thing being morally gone, and the subject of

* Jezebel is the source of mischief within, Babylon corrupts the world. Laodicea is itself cast out as worthless.

judgment, the Lord presents *Himself* as *outside* in Laodicea, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." If there are still saints within, the testimony to them is as from without the scene of which they make a part. In Philadelphia, all dealing with the saints as maintaining them in a place of testimony is closed; but the professing church had then become either Jezebel in corruption, or Sardis in death, so that it should be judged as the world; and the remnant had the testimony as keeping the word of Christ's patience, and are comforted by the assurance that Christ will come quickly. Now, they were to be content with the assurance that then the synagogue of Satan would know that Christ had loved them.

In the church of Philadelphia the character of Christ's coming was put in its true and proper place; looked at by the church, Christ's coming is *for itself*: Christ says, "It is for *you* I am coming," and the church's hope is to see Himself. It is *you* and *myself*, He says, that must be together; constituting the proper church character of hope and accomplished joy. Hence, in chapter xxii., after the Lord has gone through the whole prophecy, He says, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches"—"I am the bright and morning star;" and the presentation of Himself awakens the cry to Him to come. He does not say, as when warning men, "Behold, I come quickly." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come:" and then, in heart-assuring reply, He says, "Surely, I come quickly;" to which the church responds, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Thus it is very evident that the coming of the Lord to take the church unto Himself must be something entirely between Himself and the church alone. But it will not be so with the remnant of Israel, for them the execution of judgment will be needed, in order to their taking their place in the earth. In fact, the Lord's coming to the earth itself must be attended with the execution of judgment, gathering out of His "all things that offend, and them which do in-

iquity." And it is evident that the deliverance of the remnant of Israel connects the coming of the Lord with the execution of judgment upon what despises Him, before Israel can possibly get their blessing. And this accounts for the strong cry of vengeance we find throughout the Psalms; take Psalm xciv., for instance—"O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself." Now, we do not want vengeance in order to be with Christ in blessing. God has given us grace as our portion in every way, and we have to deal entirely with grace. I am not looking for the Lord to come and avenge me on my enemies, for I am expecting to be caught up to meet Him in the air. And that it may be clearly understood, I would again remark, that throughout the whole scriptures this cry, in connection with the Lord's coming to the earth, is the language of the remnant of Israel, and not the language of the church of God.

Take Psalm lxxviii. 23—"That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same." These are not the thoughts that occupy my soul in the contemplation of meeting Jesus in the air. If, through grace, I have bowed to the *grace* of the Lamb, then I have no connection whatever with that which will come under the *wrath* of the Lamb. It is Himself that I am expecting, for the sake of what is in Himself, apart from anything else. So also in the description of the future Jewish times of blessing, in Isaiah lx. 12, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish." While of the New Jerusalem it is said, "The leaves of the tree shall be for the healing of the nations." Israel is the scene of God's righteous judgments; the church is the scene of God's sovereign *grace*; and it never gets out of this, for the church, as such, never calls for vengeance; it will see the righteousness of the vengeance, when God shall avenge the blood of those who have suffered, and rejoice that corruption is destroyed, but its *own* portion is to be with Christ. The earth will be delivered through

judgment; but our portion is to meet the Lord in the air, and to be for ever with Him.

The church of Philadelphia having its proper portion, the coming of the Lord, the subject of this blessed hope closes. In Laodicea, therefore, there is nothing about the coming of the Lord, although it remains true, of course, but still it is not put before it. It is another thing which is in hand; and here the prophet character comes in, because the Lord is here speaking of that which was about to happen in judgment. He is going to judge the church itself; it is always the professing church He speaks of, we must remember—that which takes the place of the church of God, as the testimony for God in the world. And mark now the peculiar character Christ takes here; if the church, this vessel of testimony for God, this witness, is set aside by the Lord in disgust, then the Lord comes in Himself as the “Amen, the faithful and true witness,” not so much in the dignity of His person, as shewn in chapter i., but as the *faithful* and *true* witness—“the beginning of the creation of God, as going to take the place of that which had so entirely failed as God’s witness on the earth. In James we see the purpose of God is, “That we [the church] should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures,” and the church will have that place in the fulness of restored creation. But even now the church is called to have its own peculiar place, as having the firstfruits of the Spirit; but looked at as in a position of testimony, the church has utterly failed, not holding, in the power of the Holy Ghost, this place of firstfruits of His creatures.

For what are the fruits which mark that power? Are they not “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance?” Do you see them in the professing church? No; and therefore it is we say that the professing church has failed to be this “kind of firstfruits of God’s creatures,” for the professing church does *not* hold a place *above* the present state of *creation*, or the world around

it. Were a man to come to London from China, would he see these fruits of the Spirit in the professing church? or would he find the same covetousness, the same love of the world, here in every way as in his own country? "Oh," he might say, "I could do all this in China. What Christians are doing in London (and true Christians too) I can do throughout China; though there may be a better and more refined way of carrying them out in London than in China;" but in China there are the same results, for what professed Christians are doing in London is also done in China, though it may not be so comfortably carried out as to the *flesh*, but quite as thoroughly as to the *heart*.

I do not believe that the professing church is yet fully ripened up into the final condition of Laodicea; if it were, there would be no use in warning it. God is holding the bridle, and does not yet allow the evil to be so fully developed. It was just as true in principle in Ephesus, the moment the church departed from her *first* love; but we do not find it developed till the Laodicean state, when Christ spues the whole thing out of His mouth. And remember that it is the *professing* church that is thus spued out, and not the church of the living God, the body and bride of Christ. Nor is this excision a mere *removal* of the candlestick; for when it cannot be said of the professing church, "Ye are not of the world as I am not of the world," then, instead of its being the object of Christ's delight, it becomes, terrible to say, a disgust to Him, "*I will spue thee out of my mouth.*"

Nothing can be more solemn than the position the professing church will arrive at, to call forth such a statement on the part of the Lord. We find also in this another remarkable testimony to the successional character of these churches. In its general character, notwithstanding the special working of grace in detail, the professing church gets worse and worse, till it comes to that condition that it has to be spued out of Christ's

mouth, and then "a door is opened in heaven," and John is caught up there. (Rev. iv.) Then the judgment of the world commences, and the introduction of the Only begotten to His earthly inheritance.

God has done with the church as a testimony the moment Laodicea is spued out. And when the church has come to this entire state of failure, then Christ supplants it as the "faithful and true witness" of God. What the church should have done, Christ presents Himself as doing. Christ is the *Great Amen* of all God's promises; the church should have shewn how all the promises of God were *Yea* and *Amen* in Christ Jesus; but the church has not been able to do this, it has failed to put its *amen* to God's promises.

Amen means "firm verity and truth." (See Isa. vii. 9.) "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established,"—that is, "if you will not believe (or *amen*, for it is the same word), ye shall not be established (*amen'd*)." The meaning is, if you will not confirm my promises, you shall not be confirmed. Of course, there is not a thought of the possibility of God's failing in His purposes in Christ, and therefore the church, the body of Christ, will be in glory with its Head; but if it is a question of testimony on the earth, then truly the church has not practically put its *amen* to the promises of God in Christ. For the church was called to manifest the power of its heavenly calling while walking on the earth; but it has not in its walk given the answer to that which God has affirmed, for we do not see the church giving that heavenly witness through the Holy Ghost, answering to the Lord Jesus Christ sitting at the right hand of God; and therefore, as God cannot leave Himself without a witness, Christ immediately presents Himself as the "*Amen*, the faithful and true witness." The Person who is going to seal up all the promises and prophecies. The One who puts the *great amen* to everything as the "faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." The professing church has failed; it contains within its

pale a great mass of people that were never converted, bearing the name of Christ, without possessing the life of Christ; but the failure commenced with the true church; it was through them that corruption crept in; "they left their first love," and then, consequently, the world came in, as God says, "I looked in the place of righteousness, and behold iniquity was there;" as is often said, "the corruption of the best thing is the worst of corruptions." (So there is really nothing on the face of the whole earth so diametrically opposed to God as professing Christianity.)

"The beginning of the creation of God." Christ comes in here as the blessed witness that God will yet set up creation according to His own will, Christ Himself being the chief and centre of it all. (See Prov. viii.) It is not the promise of Christ coming to take the church to Himself, as to Philadelphia, but Christ Himself taking the place of full and perfect testimony for God, and as the accomplisher of all God's promises, of which the church should have been the manifestation. In this character, Christ, as it were, supplants the church in the manifestation of the purposes and promises of God which cannot fail. If the church be irrevocably gone, the *witness* remains, and that will be the stay of the faithful; here it is that faith is sustained, even where evil is rising up like a flood; here is solid ground that nothing can touch, the strength on which the soul can stay, supposing the church to be gone, for the stay of every soul is trusting in Him.

I would now refer to the general testimony in the word of God, as to the complete failure and consequent setting aside of that which ought to have borne testimony to Him, so that the honour, the power, and the glory, shall redound to Christ, and Christ alone. Man, as man, failed in that which was committed to him, and then we see Christ, the true Man, set up in the purposes of God. (Ps. vii.) The declaration of God is, that there will be the entire setting aside of all that

has borne the name, title, and authority of God in the earth.

Take *power*, for instance, which was ordained of God to be in the hands of man, and who was thus, in a certain sense, the representative of God; so that, as Christians, we ought to own the powers that be, and submit to them as "ordained of God." "They were called gods unto whom the word of God came . . . but they shall die like *men*, and fall like one of the princes." Now, when God judges among the gods, what does this shew? They have utterly failed—it is the immediate judgment of God which is executed. As to power then in the hands of man, the little stone cut out without hands smites the image of Gentile power, and it becomes as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, and the wind carries it away, and no more place is found for it. Christ then, according to the purpose of God, takes the full power of the kingdom. Mark what patience God is exercising during the progress of evil, denoted in this image of Daniel.

There are three distinct characters of the abuse of power in Babylon, seen in the three successional steps of evil—idolatry, profaneness, and self-exalting apostasy.

First, There was idolatry in Nebuchadnezzar setting up the statue of gold in the plains of Dura; setting up idolatry to have unity in a common religious influence. Secondly, Profaneness in Belshazzar, who brings out the vessels of God's captive temple. Thirdly, Apostasy in Darius, who set himself up to be God. God has long patience with all this, till at last, when power is headed up in positive and open rebellion against Christ, then God, rising up, in the power of the stone cut without hands, dashes the whole thing to pieces like a potter's vessel. Then the stone becomes a great mountain, filling the whole earth. Thus we see that the power that was at first given to man to be used *for* the glory of God, becoming corrupt in *man's* hand, is at the end used *against* God. And here Gentile power ceases,

in order to make way for Christ, the great vessel of power and honour to God.

Take Israel under the law. Not only do they fail, fall on the stone and be broken, but the evil spirit of idolatry which had gone out of them, will take to himself *seven other spirits* more wicked than himself, and entering in, subject them to this *perfection* of wickedness, and their last state will be worse than the first; that is, they will go on ripening in evil, till at last, when they openly join in idolatry and apostate wickedness, God will give them up as a nation, though a remnant will be spared. There is the same failure in the house of David.

As regards the church of God—there is much more difficulty in believing that there will be the utter and final rejection of it, although, of course, it is only of the professing church that this will be true. It is a solemn truth, that when evil comes in at the beginning, that it goes on increasing and ripening until judgment comes; and mark also, that judgment is not executed upon it until it is fully ripe—"The iniquity of the Amorites is *not yet full*." This principle is fully and plainly set forth in the parable of the tares. The tares were sown at the beginning, but were not to be rooted up at once. Both the tares and the wheat were to grow together until the harvest. Thus the Lord declares positively that the mischief came in at the beginning, and would go on ripening till the execution of judgment. It is not a question of individuals, or whether the wheat will be all gathered into the garner (that of course it will be), but that the public testimony is spoiled; the crop was spoiled in the field; and that could not be remedied by man, for, looked at as a crop in the field, man is not competent to remedy it, for man is not competent to judge it; besides, our business is grace, and not the rooting up of tares.

Take 2 Thessalonians, the mystery of iniquity was working in the days of the apostles, but something hindered its full manifestation. And the very same

iniquity is still working, even in this our day. "Only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way;" but the evil will still continue working until open and apostate rebellion will terminate in the full execution of judgment.

Take the Book of Revelation—without entering into the minutiae, there is a broad, plain, evident testimony to what would be the end of the whole dispensation: "I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet." (Chap. xvi. 13.) Persons may discuss what these frogs may be, but one thing is quite clear, that they are some power of evil, going forth to the kings of the earth, to gather them to the battle of that day of God Almighty, to fight against God. Thus things are ripening up to the fullest manifestation of evil; and when iniquity has arrived at the full, then a great voice from the throne will say, "It is done," and judgment then immediately follows. We get something that comes more home to ourselves, although it is applied to the professing church directly.

Before the introduction of that perfect state of good connected with the power and reign of Christ, we see all the different threads of evil drawing together for one common judgment.

Man, in his character of open rebellion, setting up to be God Himself, must be judged.

Then Israel is in association with the apostate power returning to idolatry, from which Abraham their father had been called out, identifying themselves with the apostate Gentiles, saying, "We will have no king but Cæsar;" therefore, having by their sins sold themselves to Cæsar, they must give back to Cæsar again, and associate in evil with the Gentiles, and finally be judged with them, while an election inherits the blessing. As to the Jewish nation itself, we read in Isaiah lxvi. of its thorough departure—"eating swine's flesh."

Then there is the Babylonish corruption of Christi-

anity, for the character of Babylon is that of idolatrous corruption, and it will be destroyed in the same way. All the evil will then be arrived at its height. The woman that rides the scarlet-coloured beast, the mother of harlots—the full results of Jezebel's seduction; the beast, which is power; the false prophet, man in rebellion; Christianity in apostasy; the word of God set aside; the law departed from; grace despised; all these varied forms of evil are found drawing together and coalescing, and will be in the end the one common object of judgment, the evil being thus altogether set aside, that there may be nothing left but good.

Is the professing church exempt from all this judgment? Certainly *not*. Although the *wheat* will all be safely gathered into the garner, yet, if we take the word of God as our guide, we cannot for one moment suppose that the professing church can be exempt from this general judgment. Take Jude, who, in writing to the saints, says, it was needful that he should exhort them to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to them; and why? Because “there are certain men crept in unawares—ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” “And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of *these*, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are *ungodly among them* of all their ungodly deeds.” But where were these false brethren found? In the church of God, as Jude says, “These are *spots* in your feasts of charity when they feast with you.” They were not found among the Jews, nor yet among the heathen, but in the church of God, corrupting it, “feeding themselves without fear.” God has most graciously allowed that there should be a distinct manifestation of every spring and form of evil that could ever possibly arise before the canon of scripture was closed, that we might have the judgment of the written word of God on every evil as it arises; and

without this we should not be able to detect the exceeding subtlety of the mystery of iniquity which is still working on, but having the *written word* as our guide, as God's children, we are called on to judge everything by that alone.

Again, in 2 Timothy iii., "In the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers," &c., their *false piety* being made manifest by being "lovers of *pleasure* more than lovers of God," and also "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,"—and mark that it is not mere Judaism that is meant here, although the spirit of Judaism be at work. And it is also added, "that evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." Then the apostle, having taken up the varied characteristics of those false brethren who "have crept in unawares," which characteristics also serve as a guide to us, winds up the whole by saying to Timothy, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," for "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" thus we learn in Paul's instructions to Timothy, that the only sure and safe standing-place of the man of God in this day of increasing iniquity, is the *holy scriptures*, and that, in the plain godly use of them, as he and his mother and grandmother, pious women, had studied them, the very same holy scriptures he had read from his youth. It is not authority or power (not even the power of the Spirit of God) that the saint can trust to for guidance, apart from the simple written word of God.

We learn, then, from these scriptures to which we

have been referring, that the immediate occasion, object, and inner spring of all the terrible judgment which is coming, is the professing church itself. It ought to have been God's witness on the earth; Christ's epistle known and read of all men; but having become corrupt, it is this professing church that primarily and definitely brings down the wrath of God. Oh, beloved friends, there cannot be a more solemn subject than this, that not only will Israel and the beast fall under judgment, but, according to God's own word, the professing church will come under the same condemnation. I apply the word *church* here to Christendom, that which professes to bear the name of Christ. There is the same testimony in John's Epistle—"Even now there are many antichrists." I have no doubt but that *the* Antichrist will arise among the Jews, and he will have a full manifestation of that spirit of Antichrist which even now denies the Father and the Son, and also denies that Jesus is the Christ. It is indeed most fearful to think of that apostasy, bearing a religious character as it does; that which characterizes the many antichrists is the denial of christian truth, and though there will be a full apostasy, still, it will be an apostasy from the doctrines of Christianity. How soon did the spirit of it come in; how very soon was there cause to say, that "all men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ." May the Lord graciously open the eyes of His saints to see the tone and real character of these last evil days, and to remember, that though He has had long patience while He is gathering out souls for salvation, and in this sense to "account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation"—that His judgment, though *delayed* is *not changed*, for the word is gone forth out of His mouth, and the only remedy for the present evil is in judgment.

From the very beginning we see the principles of corruption coming in. The testimony for God failed—the tares were sown, thus the crop was spoiled in the field, the mystery of iniquity was working. In the

address to Laodicea, we find the Lord shewing the evil principles which came in at the beginning producing the double character found in Laodicea. The object for which the seed had been sown in the field was spoiled: instead of being a witness for God, the church says, "*I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.*" Thus we find there are *two* points of special importance as characterizing this church of Laodicea—great pretension to spiritual riches in itself, and neither hot nor cold as regards Christ. First, there is great *pretension* to spiritual riches, but then as to *life*, they had the form of it, but not the power—"thou art neither cold nor hot." It is not positive hatred to Christ, but it is not positive zeal for Christ; it is the church going on in outward comfort and worldliness, and at the same time making great pretensions to spiritual riches, which is a sure sign of poverty; for whenever we see great profession to possess within *itself* the riches of God, we shall be sure to find poverty. And why? Because those riches can only be found in Christ. When the church says, "*I am rich and increased in goods,*" and makes itself the vessel of grace instead of Christ, "*and have need of nothing,*" it boasts of riches within itself, thus, in so doing, it neither puts its "*amen*" to the promises of God in Christ Jesus, nor is it the true and faithful witness for God. The church ceases to be this directly it looks away from Christ as the only source, and when it takes itself to the vessel of riches, it then necessarily becomes a false witness instead of a *true one*: for, the moment *I* say the church is all this or that, the church is what *I* am looking at, and not Christ; the eye is completely taken off Christ to the church, *I* am looking to *it* instead of to *Him*, however much *I* may pretend to honour Him. The faithfulness of God is not the question here, but our failure. This is of the last importance as guarding against deception.

In Philadelphia they were not possessing all that they were endowed with in Christ: they had but a

little strength, and all that the Lord could say of them was, that they had kept His word, and had not denied His name. While there was felt poverty in the church, Christ was delighting in them, and could say, I am for you, and I am coming for you. "I will make them of the synagogue of Satan to know that I have loved thee"—but directly there is the pretension to riches in itself. When the church is taking riches, and accrediting itself with them, instead of Christ's delighting in it, there is an expression of positive *disgust*—"I will spue thee out of my mouth." And if we look at the professing church at the present day, we shall see how it is getting into this state, *rich in itself*. When I find but very little strength, while the word is kept, and His name not denied, then I can say, "Cheer up, the Lord is coming soon." For acknowledging I am poor, and have but little strength, is not necessarily unbelief in Christ; it is not necessarily denying what is in Him for our use, when we lean upon Him for strength, because we have none. It is the body drawing the fulness from the Head. But when I find in a church this thought of fulness and riches in itself, then I say you are going on towards Laodicea, whose end is to be spued out of Christ's mouth. The church of Laodicea, having the thought of fulness and riches within herself, was perfectly ignorant of her state before God: "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" therefore, says the Lord, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."

The church was not looking to the Lord for these; and therefore was wanting in everyone of them. Gold is divine righteousness—the great contrast to human righteousness, and is that which characterizes the

standing, and riches, and foundation of the saints. "The white raiment" is the works of the saints, which are the fruits of believing in divine righteousness; they are consequent upon the possession of divine righteousness.

Human righteousness is quite a distinct thing from the righteousness of saints; for the righteousness of saints flows from hearts set at liberty by divine righteousness. If we look at the Faquir in India, or the Dervish in Turkey, we find plenty of *works*, but never anything that is founded on *redemption*. The works of the Spirit flow out from the Spirit which has been the seal of divine righteousness to the soul; these saintly works are the fruits of the Holy Ghost in us. Here, then, is the "white raiment," which those at Laodicea were lacking; therefore they had not got even the righteousness of saints, for, being without divine righteousness, they could have no practical spiritual righteousness, no saintly works, as it is said that the "fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." They were also wanting in "eye-salve," for they were as blind as nature could be to the things of God, and without spiritual discernment in anything, and yet they were saying, "*We see*," therefore their sin remained. Thus, having neither divine righteousness, nor the consequent fruits of the Spirit, and still remaining in the blindness of nature, Laodicea wanted everything. There was abundance of pretension, while all that was real before God was wanting, and all that was fictitious was there.

But the Lord does not yet give up all dealing with them; but here in Laodicea the Lord takes an *outside* character; for when the nominal church has got practically into a Jewish position, then the Lord takes His stand *outside*, and calls to individual souls that are *within*, "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice." The Lord desires to gain attention; He wants to be admitted; He warns the church of what is coming upon it—of *positive judgment*; but

until that judgment is executed, He goes on necessarily in the exercise of His own blessed grace. But its objects are individual, for the church is given up—"If any man will open the door, I will come in to him, and I will sup with him and he with me;" he will have his portion at *my table*—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne."

Now mark, this is apparently a great promise; but to me it seems the very least, as it is merely a *place* in the heavenly glory; they are told of no special association with Christ, such as we find in the promise to Pergamos, or even to the faithful in Sardis or in Thyatira. Nor is any thought of individual nearness, exclusively the portion of the bride, revealed as a motive. Reigning with Christ is merely the public display of reward and glory, which is a very different thing from the secret intimacy of the "*hidden manna*," and the "*white stone*." The knock was heard, and through grace obeyed, and they go up to heavenly glory; they have overcome, and therefore surely they must have their reward, "to sit with me on my throne." These also have their part in the "first resurrection," and, as such, they reign with Christ. But as much might be said of the two witnesses. "They went up, and their enemies beheld them." They sit on thrones; they have their reward, but the reward just amounts to the fact that they have got their *place* in the glory; but there is not the same intimacy, there is not the special delight, there is not the Philadelphian joy of Christ having the church for the sake of *herself*, and the church having Christ for the sake of *Himself*. Still, they get their *place* in the glory.

The solemn testimony of the Lord is, that the professing church is to be spued out of His mouth, and this ought to come home with more sorrow in our hearts than the judgment of the world, having a much more terrible character to the heart than the judgment of Antichrist himself, because it is something that disgusts Christ—that is nauseous to Him, from its having

had a kind of outward connection with Himself; and hence the importance of this, if we think of that in the midst of which we are. And in speaking of the professing church in the day in which we live, I mean what is commonly called Christendom, bearing the name of Christ, but in works denying Him. We find Christ's heart, thoughts, and nature, utterly rejecting that as disgusting which had been professing to be standing in connection with Himself.

There will be at the close much more connection between Judaism and nominal Christianity than people generally suppose. The lamb with two horns, the false prophet of Revelation, assuming the character of the Messiah, will play into the hands of the Roman Emperor. From the very beginning the corruption in the church has had this double character: of idolatry, the worshipping of angels, &c.—and Judaism. Take the Colossians: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit;" or "judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days:" and again, "Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels." Then take the Galatians: by Jewish suggestion they were observing "days, months, times, and years." The tendency has ever been to mix up Christianity with Judaism; and when Judaism is set aside by God, it is nothing better than heathenism (see Gal. iv. 8-10)—carnal religion—the Gentilism of worshipping angels—philosophy and vain deceit on the one hand, and the Judaism of keeping days, months, and years, on the other, had entered the church at the first, and were the occasion of Paul's warning against the going back to the beggarly elements, and that Jewish bondage from which they had been set free; as he says, "After that you have known God, how turn ye *again* to those weak and beggarly elements whereby ye desire to be in bondage?"

God had taken up the flesh in Israel, to prove that there was nothing good in it; He had allowed the Jews

to follow the tendency of man's religion, in giving them the law, and ordinances, and sumptuous apparel, and gorgeous buildings, with the sound of trumpets and the like ; but now Christ is come, and He is " the end of the law for righteousness," by which the Galatians were delivered from their heathen ignorance and false gods ; but then they go back, and by embracing Judaism they really got back again, as if still alive in flesh's life in this world, into the old heathenism, the spirit of which is the religion of the flesh. As figures, God may have used these things to try man till the promised seed was come ; but now it has its own character, as before in heathenism, without God in any way ; the righteousness of the flesh, which will take up with anything which will give a form of fair colouring. Therefore the tide of corruption which set in at the beginning, this turning back to beggarly elements—religiousness in the flesh, that will settle itself in ordinances, seeking anything but eye-salve, will go on increasing till the end, being all one principle ; and thus coalesce with what is formally Judaism, and Judaism with it, in a full idolatrous character. The deception of the present day is Judaism, it is that which is satisfied with anything which takes the form without the power of godliness.

It is that principle of Babylonish idolatry which will ultimately govern through the beast. The spirit of infidelity will accept anything but the claim of the truth—it will accept Judaism as such, and it will accept the Babylonish system as such ; and the consequence will be, that the unbelieving Jews will be seduced by the Babylonish power taking the form of Judaism in the East, while in the West it will be open Babylonish idolatry. And most solemn it is to think that this world through which we are walking is to be the scene of all these things. And however much the professing church may now be the pride and boast of man, at the end it will be as such spued out of Christ's mouth, with every pretension, even to the full power of the

Holy Ghost, but with nothing that gives Christ His value, but attributing all the value to itself, accrediting itself with it.

May the Lord keep us in the Philadelphian condition—it may be with but very little strength—yet keeping the word of His patience, and in the sensible enjoyment of perfect association with Himself—who has set before us an open door, and will keep it open until He come and takes us to Himself.

APPENDIX.

THE preceding notes of Lectures, whose object was the practical edification of the saints of God, leave room for expressing with more precision what I believe to be the successive states of the church, to which the moral condition unfolded in each of the churches respectively applies.

The reader of the Lectures will remember that he is not to expect, in any case, to find the active energy of the Spirit of God, which produces the blessing of the church, but the form or condition of the professing church after that energy has been in operation, and man's responsibility comes into play. There may be a measure of blessing, or great culpability. But the energy of the Holy Ghost cannot be the object of judgment.

The first church, indeed, shews the decline of the saints from the first condition of blessing, produced by the power of the Holy Ghost. This sufficiently indicates the epoch to which it refers, while it characterizes in a general way the result for the whole professing church, as a system established by God in this world, as a light in the world, and as such the church is considered here; not in its safety as the true living body of Christ, according to the power of redemption secured by the unfailing power of Christ.

It had left its first love. This was the point which marked that man had failed under the blessing of God. If the church, as seen in the world, did not return to do its first works, it would be removed. This was already its state in apostolic days, immediately after its first planting, for such is man. Responsibility under

the gift of the Holy Ghost, failure, threat of removal, if there was not a return to its first estate—such is the word to Ephesus. She is called back to the work of the Holy Ghost, in practical result, at the beginning. There was much that was yet good, among other things maintaining the bonds of natural relationship as moral ties, and the judgment of those pretending to authoritative teaching. But there was practical departure of heart from Christ.

This soon paved the way for putting the church into tribulation, for a limited time, however. The poor of the flock, the faithful ones, would be subject to injurious accusations from those professing to have established claims to be God's people, and persecution from without. This characterized the church. This state lasted from Nero to Diocletian.

After this another state of things characterized the church. It had gone through persecution, and there had been faithful martyrs. The world, where its earthly dwelling was, had been its enemy. Now doctrines, or rather teaching, came in, which led it into association with the world—to commit fornication, and eat things sacrificed to idols; so, when he could not curse and destroy as an enemy, had Balaam done with Israel, he counselled corruption as a friend. There were also doctrines that led to evil deeds, that sanctioned the breach of direct moral ties. Personal faithfulness was called from the midst of the evil. This went on from Constantine—was creeping in before—but now *characterized* the church, and continued to do so, till it became an established system; and Popery, as such, was the mother of children in the professing church.

Such is Thyatira. Jezebel is not simply a prophetess to seduce God's servants; as those who held the doctrine of Balaam, she is the mother of children. Those that associated with her would be in great tribulation—her children under utter judgment. Here already the call to hear is after separating the remnant. In the three first churches it was still in connection with the

whole body ; and, further, all repenting and restoration of the body at large is dropped, and Christ's coming held out, and the entire change of dispensation as the hope of the saints. This closes, I apprehend, the general prophetic history of the whole body at large.

We have next Protestantism, (I do not say the Reformation, as a work of God's active power in the Holy Ghost, but) the great public result among men in professing Christendom. Christ is seen, therefore, afresh, with all in His hand, for the church. As to the church itself, it has a name to live, but is dead. It is not Jezebel producing children of corruption, and whoredom, and idolatry—but there is no answering to what has been received and heard. It would be visited as the world in judgment at Christ's coming—compare 1 Thessalonians v. It may be remarked that the general characteristic states go down to the end. As Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and, of course, Laodicea, though some may begin late.

But all was not to be left in this state. There was not to be restoration of strength. If I may so speak, the seven spirits and seven stars were useless in Christ's hand, if it was not to condemn. But there would be a company *true to Christ*, keeping His word, not denying His name ; having only a little strength, but the door open before it. Christ's character, not His power, is put forward ; and consistency, obedience, and dependence, and owning Christ, are marked by the Holy Ghost as those whom Christ would shew He had loved. They were comforted with the thought that He was coming quickly.

The result remained apart from these despised ones—the result as to the general professing body. It was not Jezebel-corruption, but lukewarmness, having a high idea of what it had, but without divine righteousness—without spiritual discernment—without the fruits of a spiritual character. It was spued out of Christ's mouth. Such was the end of the professing world as distinct from Jezebel. Thus the whole characteristic

history of the professing church is given from the apostles' days, till it is utterly rejected or judged by the judgment of God; a warning given already to Ephesus, but executed, after marvellous patience, in Jezebel and Laodicea, Christ then, as in His title in the address to Laodicea, taking the place of witness, which the church had not been able to maintain. The Lord give us now a true Philadelphian character.

